fraught with background

Critical Theory and the Realistic Novel

by Lee Taylor
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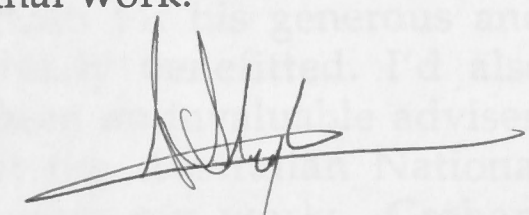
This thesis is all my own original work.



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abstract

In twentieth-century literary theory, the concept of realism has been highly contentious. Much critical attention has been devoted to a radical critique of realism which has advocated a rejection, or at least a supercession, of realistic aesthetics, on philosophical and literary grounds. Realism has been characterized as at least outdated and perhaps fundamentally mistaken in its aesthetic and epistemological premises.

In this thesis I shall try to challenge this radical critique without resorting to simple ideas of objectivity or positivism. By analysing various kinds of anti-realistic critical theory, I shall try to show that this radical critique has set up an idea of realism which is vulnerable to their criticisms but which does not adequately represent the nature of realistic representation, particularly in the novel. I shall then turn to the works of three prominent twentieth-century critical authors and offer an interpretation of their theories which leads towards an alternative view of realism.

Presenting this alternative view of realism is the principal ambition of this thesis. Rather than seeing realism as the literary consequence of epistemological positivism, I shall try to show that realism can be understood as a historicizing and ironic interpretive process. By creating determinate representations of social and historical reality, realism simultaneously makes possible a theoretical critique of that reality. These seemingly contradictory tendencies are, I shall try to show, fundamentally indivisible. There are, of course, many uses to which the term "realism" has been put, and I do not propose to attempt finally to define *the* idea of realism. Rather, I shall suggest only that it is possible theoretically to consider the realistic novel as a tensile literary form which embodies the relationship between representation and critique. Thus, the seeming antithesis between realism and critical theory is, I suggest, misplaced. The alternative view for which I shall argue in this thesis encourages a reevaluation of both the realistic novel and critical theory.

contents

prologue

Since the dawn of literary and aesthetic theory scholars have been preoccupied with the representation of reality in literature. It has been, perhaps, the most enduring problem, if not the defining concern, of the study of literature since antiquity. The representational dimension of literature arises famously in classical philosophy. In Book 10 of *The Republic*, Socrates asks what would become a recurrent question with which literary critics and theorists would struggle:

> 'Can you tell me in general terms what representation *is* ? I'm not sure that I know, myself, exactly how to describe its purpose.'[1]

As is well-known, Socrates and his interlocutors go on to consider the relationship between poetry and truth in light of the theory of Forms. For Plato, mimetic representation defined poetry and, since representation was always twice-removed from Form, poetry remained only ever a falsity, a misrepresentation of the truth. The poets, therefore, were excluded from the republic.

Aristotle, on the other hand, embraced poetry precisely because he understood it as mimetic, and, in contrast to Plato, incorporated mimesis as an integral part of his own theories of knowledge and truth. Neither of these philosophers, of course, is well served by this ridiculously brief account, and, in truth, what they countenance as mimetic poetry bears little relationship to contemporary literary genres and forms. Indeed, as we shall see, it has been a common critical error to associate Aristotelian mimesis with contemporary ideas of literary realism. Nonetheless, this early disagreement as to the value of a general realistic ambition illustrates the perennially contentious nature of the question.

In these two literary theories we can see that, from the first, the question of the representation of reality, indeed of reality itself, is marked by critical and philosophical dispute; different philosophical bases, and different views as to the relationship between literature and reality, give rise to different literary theories which in turn imply contrasting aesthetic and philosophical conclusions. Plato and Aristotle, we can say, are the deepest

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[1]Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Desmond Lee (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1974), p.422.

background of the problem of realistic representation which, as I shall argue, is of persistent critical and philosophical import.

This potential for, and history of, critical contestation occasion the present study. While the claims of Plato and Aristotle may have given way, the subsequent histories of literature and of literary theory offer little more by way of resolution of the problem of realistic representation. Questions remain: how is realistic representation possible, what kind of philosophical claims does it make, how can it be theorized, how important is it ? "Can you tell me," we might ask, echoing Socrates, "what it *is* ?"

What follows doesn't claim definitively to provide an answer to this loaded question. I propose, rather, a theoretical exploration of what I call the "fraught background" of realistic representation. The phrase "fraught with background" comes from Auerbach's great study *Mimesis*, and it serves as the title of this study because of its divergent connotations. In one sense, fraught calls forth a range of uncomfortable connotations: a sense of peril, of tension, of anxiety, and certainly the history of critical approaches to realistic representation is well-marked by these. Critical debates over realistic representation have extended to questions of language, of genre, of the nature of art, certainly, but also to philosophy, psychology and politics. As it is implicated in so many contentious areas of inquiry, we cannot but sympathize with Hayden White's assessment of realistic literary representation as "the most vexed problem in modern (Western) literary criticism".[2]

In another sense of "fraught", its background is pregnant or laden with conceptual cargo that offers itself to continued critical rummaging about. It is possible to see realistic representation as not merely a stubbornly persistent remnant of an ancient critical debate but as a rich vein of theoretical ore which is far from being exhausted.

These two senses, however, cannot really be so neatly divided. The contentious history is what makes it so pregnant an issue. But in order to make the present study manageable, its ambition must be tempered by clear limits and boundaries. I do not, as I have said, propose a

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[2]Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), p.2, n.4.

comprehensive answer to the question of realistic representation, but merely aim to suggest one way in which it might be considered. My inquiry, therefore, must acknowledge two important constraints.

The first is the kind of literary phenomena with which we are concerned. What Plato and Aristotle meant by mimesis is far removed from modern literary forms and we are not here concerned with classical mimesis but rather with the question of realism as it has emerged and developed in the relatively recent genre of the novel. Realism is not, of course, the only achievement or ambition of the novel, but it has been a concept with which the novel has been closely associated. This idea will be explained in more detail in due course but it is important to make clear that in discussing the representation of reality in literature I am concerned with a particular kind of representation which is not exclusive.

The second constraint, or rather parameter, of this inquiry is that it is intended to be a study in modern literary theory. More particularly, I shall be concerned to examine the relationship between realism and various developments in modern literary theory, proceeding from a perceived antithesis between the two towards a reconciliation which is based on a particular synthetic theoretical approach. This too will be expanded in what follows. My purpose at this stage is only to introduce the two key ideas of this thesis; the realistic novel, and critical theory. As a recent controversy in Australia over a novel which was purported to be based upon testimonial evidence, which then turned out to have been entirely fictitious, will attest, the question of realistic representation is still contentious. I hope here cautiously to investigate the critical background to this question and to suggest that it remains an important issue in contemporary literary theory.

- Introduction -

Truth, reality, and the novel

In *The Seagull* by Anton Chekhov an interesting dramatic conflict arises between a young, aspiring writer and an older, established writer. The older man, Boris Aleksyeevich, is to be seen in the play observing the other characters and making notes in his book; material, presumably, for his novel. But Kostia, the younger man, rails against this kind of artistic method, against, he says,

> these high priests of a sacred art depicting the way people eat, drink, make love, walk about and wear their clothes ...[1]

Kostia, admittedly, is talking about theatre not the novel, but his implicit criticism of Boris can be extended to that genre as well. What he rails against, and what Boris holds to, put very simply, is realism. Now the term realism is extremely volatile; it has been put to so many uses in literary criticism alone that its usefulness has often, and with some justice, been questioned.[2] Nonetheless, I shall be using it in this thesis mainly because alternative terms or phrases are either bulky and awkward, like "the representation of reality in literature," or "realistic literary representation," or are also vague and potentially misleading, like "mimesis." As I shall be using the term, it is important to make clear what is conceived by it for the purposes of this thesis. The subtitle of this thesis relies upon two terms which require clarification before any sort of argument can proceed.

(a) The novel and the philosophy of realism

Realism, as I am using it here, does not refer to any particular period in literary history, nor to a prescribed literary method. Rather, I understand realism to indicate a literary ambition - to represent social and historical reality - which is achieved through certain literary techniques. The features of this idea of realism are, very broadly, those developed in the

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[1]Anton Chekhov, *Plays*, trans. Elisaveta Fen (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1954), p.123.
[2]A good discussion of the usefulness or otherwise of the term" realism" is provided in Damian Grant, *Realism* (London: Methuen, 1970). In the following section of this study I shall discuss in greater detail Roman Jakobson's interrogation of the term.

nineteenth-century novel in Europe and Britain, although, as I have said, my use of realism is not confined to the period concept of realism. G.J. Becker has suggested that the "reality" towards which realism is intended is an amalgamation of a belief in the existence of external phenomena and the apprehension or perception/observation of these phenomena.[3] More specifically, it is a synthesis of the apprehension, in a very broad sense, of the external world and the concomitant sense that external world doesn't only exist by virtue of such apprehension. Other people, for example, have similar access to that world. What we are dealing with then is the representation of social life as it may be observed - the aesthetic approach adopted by Chekhov's Boris Aleksyeevich.

The subject matter of realistic representation, then, is the external social world, and the mode of representation is a perceptual/observational or apprehending consciousness which strives towards objectivity. A novel like *Ulysses*, therefore, is not altogether realistic because, while it may be concerned, as Joyce certainly was, with the details of everyday Dublin, its manner of presentation, at least in parts of the novel, tends more towards the imaginative or symbolic than the observational. Realism must assimilate both an idea of external reality - individuals and their social and historical environment - and the observation of that reality. Given this definition of realism, we can see how some kinds of narrative situate themselves outside the realistic paradigm: Virginia Woolf, we might say, goes too far towards the observing consciousness, while Alain Robbe-Grillet, for example, gets too close to the objects, for their respective techniques straightforwardly to be considered realistic. Realism, in a sense, is a kind of "middling"[4] - middle-distance, middle-class, and, as Becker points out, realistic novels begin in the middle - to the events of a

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[3]See George J. Becker, "Introduction: Modern Realism as a Literary Movement" in George J. Becker ed., *Documents of Modern Literary Realism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963). Other descriptive surveys of realism which have been particularly useful include René Wellek, "The Concept of Realism in Literary Scholarship" in his *Concepts of Criticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963); Damian Grant, *Realism* ; J.P. Stern, *On Realism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973). More recently, Wallace Martin's primer of narrative theory provides a thorough overview of these ideas; see Wallace Martin, *Recent Theories of Narrative* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986).

[4]George Levine makes this point with regard to the historical development of realism in England; see George Levine, *The Realistic Imagination: English Fiction from Frankenstein to Lady Chatterley* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p.5.

realistic novel, unlike, say, lyric poetry, there is a background and a future.[5]

This kind of realism is, of course, most commonly associated with the novel, and, as I've said, with certain nineteenth-century novels. Ian Watt's well-known historical account of the novel posits an important correlation between the two, suggesting that the development of realism as an aesthetic ambition required stylistic changes from previous generic forms to which the novel was particularly well-suited.[6] The strength of the association between the novel and realism leads Wallace Martin to suggest that they "are often treated as interchangeable terms".[7] But the kind of realism which is contemplated in this study is not necessarily limited to the "realists" of the nineteenth-century. As I have said, realism is understood as an ambition, or, as Raymond Williams puts it, "a general attitude"[8] which is not only defined by the specific techniques which are commonly associated with nineteenth-century novels. In the final part of this thesis I shall discuss in detail two quite different novels from different periods and cultures to test the strength of the theoretical method developed in the first two parts.

With this idea of realism in mind, it is necessary to ask several preliminary questions. How is it, for example, that readers read a novel as realistic ? Novels are, after all, fictitious. What ideas of truth and of reality are implied in the suggestion that a novel is "realistic" or "true-to-life ?" Paradoxically, the true-to-life was generally not literally true at all; in a sense, the realistic novel revives Aristotle's distinction between poetry and history and his preference for the former because of its greater access to essential truths. Clearly, the idea of realism involves some very grave questions about truth, and about cognates of truth, such as knowledge, objectivity, and reference. These questions, very broadly, relate to what we might call the "philosophy of realism."

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[5]See Becker, *Documents of Modern Literary Realism*, p.29.

[6]See Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (1957; London: Hogarth Press, 19487), pp.31ff. Watt doesn't suggest that these literary techniques, which he calls "formal realism," were invented in the novel or by novelists but that they were simply more important, more concentrated in the novel.

[7]Martin, *Recent Theories of Narrative*, p.57.

[8]Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A vocabulary of culture and society* (1983; London: Fontana Press, 1988), p.260.

Philosophically, realism orginally meant something other than what is usually inferred.[9] But the more familiar sense of realism with which we are concerned here proceeds from some seemingly very simple philosophical propositions. Fredric Jameson, for example, correlates the moment of realism with what he calls a "bourgeois cultural revolution" towards which the function of the realistic novel is "the systematic undermining and demystification, the secular 'decoding,' of those preexisting inherited traditional or sacred narrative paradigms which are its initial givens."[10] Setting aside the political and historical implications of Jameson's claim, we can see that his view suggests that philosophically realism is a narrative response to a kind of relocation of truth. Although writing in a different current of ideas, Watt makes an analogous suggestion. In making a conceptual connection between what he calls philosophical realism and the novel, he describes this kind of relocation as a turn towards "the position that truth can be discovered by the individual through his senses",[11] an idea which also resembles Martin's suggestion that histories of realism presuppose a "philosophical commitment to a scientific view of man and society, one opposed to idealism and traditional religious views."[12]

The range of philosophical and historical implications which can be drawn from this view of the "philosophy of literary realism" is far too extensive to be discussed here in any detail. A.D. Nuttall, for example, begins his discussion with reference to seventeenth-century philosophy of language in England - that of Hobbes, Spratt, and Locke[13] - while Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth argues that realism "belongs to a cultural tradition that took its direction from Renaissance humanism."[14] Nonetheless, it is important briefly to dwell on the idea of a philosophy of realism.

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[9] Ian Watt writes: "By a paradox that will surprise only the neophyte, the term 'realism' in philosophy is most strictly applied to a view of reality diametrically opposed to that of common usage - to the view held by the scholastic Realists that it is universals, classes or abstractions, and not the particular concrete objects of sense-perception, which are the true 'realities'"; *Rise of the Novel*, p.11.

[10] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Routledge, 1983), p.152.

[11] Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, p.12.

[12] Martin, *Recent Theories of Narrative*, p.61. Martin is summarizing Becker's argument in *Documents of Modern Literary Realism* and Wellek's in *Concepts of Criticism*.

[13] A.D. Nuttall, *A New Mimesis: Shakespeare and the Representation of Reality* (London: Methuen, 1983), pp.1-2.

[14] Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, *Realism and Consensus in the English Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), p.3.

Alongside the suggestion that realism presupposes a "scientific" view, we must understand that it is a specific kind of science, one that we might call a civic science. Juxtaposing philosophical realism and literary realism, Watt makes a telling comparison:

> The novel's mode of imitating reality may therefore be equally well summarised in terms of the procedures of another group of specialists, the jury in a court of law. Their expectations, and those of the novel reader coincide in many ways: both want to know ' all the particulars' of a given case - the time and place of the occurrence; both must be satisfied as to the identities of the parties concerned, and will refuse to accept evidence about anyone called Sir Toby Belch or Mr. Badman - still less about a Chloe who has no surname and is 'common as the air'; and they also expect the witness to tell the story 'in his own words'. The jury, in fact, takes the 'circumstantial view of life' ...[15]

This allusion to jurisprudence recalls George Eliot's oft-quoted suggestion, in *Adam Bede*, that the narrator speaks as if from the witness-box under oath, of course, to tell the truth,[16] and also prefigures Tzvetan Todorov's critique of verisimilitude which begins by suggesting that legal judgements are made not on the truth but on the most plausible testimony.[17] The analogy with jurisprudence, however, is itself highly fraught; as Ermarth points out, there is not only truth involved, but also the law.[18] But without relying too heavily upon it, it is helpful as a metaphor for the kind of philosophy with which realism might be attributed. The truth of this philosophy, it might be said, is secular, observational, and consensual, and it is approached through rigorous objectivity and, as Watt points out, through a faith in the referential capacity of language.

Such a view can account for the seeming paradox that realistic novels are, in large part, fictional. The "truth" of a realistic novel, its realistic efficacy,

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[15]Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, p.31.
[16]See Becker, *Documents of Modern Literary Realism*, p.113.
[17]See Tzvetan Todorov, *Poétique de la prose* (Paris: Seuil, 1971), p.92. Todorov's critique will be discussed in greater detail below.
[18]See Ermarth, *Realism and Consensus*, p.33.

lies not in the fact that the events actually happened, or that the narrator, author, or reader were present at the supposed events, observing the characters, listening to them speak. No-one, I suspect, believes that the town of Middlemarch, for example, actually exists. Rather, the "truth" of realism resides in its adherence to this particular model of truth. The literary techniques achieve a simulation of objective apprehension of the external phenomenal world. Inclusion of historical and geographical particulars reinforces the plausibility of a realistic narrative, detailed observation of the social environment convinces readers that this or that novel is "true-to-life."

(b) Critical theories and the crisis of truth

The other important term in my subtitle - critical theory - also needs clarification because the many different ways in which the epithet "critical" has been employed and appropriated. Critical philosophy, for example, can refer to very different philosophical tendencies. Kant, of course, sets out his philosophy as a series of critiques which at once criticize and validate the subjects of his analysis such as reason or ethics. But this model is at odds with other claims which attach to "critical." Vincent Descombes, for example, cites Deleuze's contention that Kant's philosophy fails as a "critical" philosophy, which is achieved, rather, by Nietzsche.[19] The term "critical theory" has strong associations with the Frankfurt School. Indeed, Horkheimer and Adorno claimed that what they called Critical Theory represented an inevitable and necessary advance on philosophical critique,[20] a development which might be said to have effected or at least attempted a permanent redefinition of the word "critical." This background is further complicated by the very broad idea of literary criticism which is often divided into so-called theoretical criticism and so-called practical criticism.

Given these complications, it is important to make clear that my use of the term critical theory is not confined to one or another of these usages. Rather, "critical" here refers to a particularly interrogative attitude towards

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[19]See Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, trans.L. Scott Fox and J.M. Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p.155.

[20]Habermas' essay on Horkheimer and Adorno discusses this in some detail; see Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987), pp.116ff.

the study of literature. Discussing the problem of critical philosophy, Descombes writes that

> Philosophy which never takes *this is the way it is* for an answer, which wants to see this as the point of departure for an interrogation, merits being called *critical* (*critique*).[21]

Descombes' standard of *critique* or *critical* is particularly helpful. If we make the generic transition from critical philosophy to critical literary theory we can see that, understood in this fashion, a critical theory must interrogate both the text and its own approach towards the text. Neither is "given," nor simply the "way it is." Intellectual movements, such as Critical Theory, then, are instances of such an approach, but certainly do not, for the purposes of the present study, exhaust the idea of critical theory.

If this interrogation of "the way it is" is regarded as the "critical" dimension of literary theory, we can see, then, that the seeming dedication to the way it is in the realistic novel appears to collide with a critical disposition. If the standards of reality and of truth discussed above are hallmarks of "the philosophy of realism" then the realistic novel runs into a problem. Such a "philosophy" would seem to fall short of the working definition of "critical" at which we have arrived and, consequently, a critical theory of literature would seem necessarily to reject the realistic novel. This problem can be examined more clearly if we return specifically to the questions of truth and reality which were discussed above.

The quasi-scientific, objective, referential "truth" of realism is, of course, regarded as hopelessly outdated in contemporary critical theory, often relegated to a particular historical period, and sometimes cited as evidence of the fundamental errors - epistemological, political, artistic - of that period.[22] Theoretically aware literary critics cannot use expressions like

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[21]Vincent Descombes, *Grammaire d'objets en tous genres* (Paris: Minuit, 1983), p.130, trans. mine.

[22]Fully to recapitulate the vast scholarship on this point would be an impossible task. Briefly, however, the reference is to the burgeoning scientism of the nineteenth-century which roughly coincided with Rankean "objective" historiography, rapid industrialization in Europe and, as it happens, the era of the realistic novel. Critics of the methods and claims of each of these ideas are numerous, and some critics, such as Barthes

"Dickens' representation of Victorian London," without a lingering anxiety about having resorted to a number of suspect presuppositions. To continue to use such ideas, it might be said, is to have kept one's critical head in the sand for at least the last three decades, and quite possibly for much longer. The referentiality of language has been questioned at least since Plato's *Cratylus*, objectivity is increasingly elusive, knowledge is a problem, and truth everywhere is in crisis.

This crisis of truth and knowledge is an important motivation behind the history of philosophy. Each philosophical truth displaces the last, or, rather, each tries to establish itself in an environment of clashing ideas. Nietzsche, an important figure in the crisis of truth, offers this account:

> A great wind blows among the trees, and everywhere fruit fall down - truths. The squandering of an all-too-rich autumn: one stumbles over truths, one steps on and kills a few - there are too many.[23]

Many responses to the crisis of truth are possible. Nietzsche's own response was a wilful appropriation of truth, a juxtaposition of truth and power which validated Bacon's conflation of knowledge and power and prefigured the more recent exploration of this idea, most notably in the work of Michel Foucault. Other responses include Hegel's curious dualism of *Geist* which posited two kinds and two repositories of truth, which were still very closely connected. Literary theory made its own set of responses, which, as we shall see, have had the cumulative effect of placing literary realism under a radical question mark. Given that truth is so contentious, it can be asked whether realism has anything other than a regressive function, whether any continued store in realism is not just a rejection of the crisis of truth.

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and Jameson, argue a correspondence between two or more of these cultural phenomena. This is evident in Jameson's description of realism as a contribution to the "bourgeois cultural revolution" (see note 9 above) and Barthes' suggestion that the contemporaneity of the realistic novel and objective historiography - and other "authentic" representational practices - was no coincidence; see Roland Barthes, "The reality effect" in Tzvetan Todorov ed. *French literary theory today: A Reader*, trans. R. Carter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p.15.

[23]Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals, and, Ecce Homo*, ed. Walter Kaufmann, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), p.314. The quotation is from *Ecce Homo* and is in reference to Nietzsche's *Twilight of the Idols*.

As I have indicated, much contemporary literary theory is highly skeptical of realism, for precisely these reasons. Realism is implicated in the denial of or non-response to critical thought which concerns itself with the proliferation of different ideas of truth and knowledge. Critical theories of all kinds are employed in efforts rigorously to undermine truth-claims and to reveal the limits, shortcomings, and conditions of knowledge.

The subtitle of this study, then, countenances what appears to be an antithesis between its two key terms - critical theory and the realistic novel. Certainly, as I shall discuss below, such an opposition has often been suggested and endorsed, but in what follows I shall be suggesting that it is possible to argue for a different relationship between the two, a relationship which is synthetical rather than antithetical. This thesis, then, is an inquiry into the relationship between realism, which, as we have seen, seems to rely on a truth-claim, and critical theory, which challenges the very idea of a truth-claim. As Hans-Georg Gadamer puts it, we have seen a "theoretical weakening of our belief in knowledge",[24] and literary theory, in conjunction with similar developments in other disciplines, has made varying responses to this phenomenon.

(c) Synthesizing realism and theory - the aim of this study

For the purposes of this study realism is not taken simply to refer to certain periods in literary history, or to specific literary techniques and devices. The idea of realism with which I am concerned, as I have said, involves an idea of reality as a social and historical environment, rather than as an overtly symbolic or imaginational environment, or as a highly individualized view of that social and historical environment. The representation of this reality rests upon the communication of a view of this environment to the reader. While readers do not experience the reality represented by the text, they come to know it through the text. The tense environment of the Russian aristocracy on the eve of Napoleon's incursions, provincial life in late-Georgian England, the social and economic volatility of the U.S.A. in the 1920s; these social backgrounds are literary figures of which readers achieve a kind of vicarious knowledge,

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[24]Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Truth in the Human Sciences" in Brice R. Wachterhauser ed. and trans., *Hermeneutics and Truth* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1994), p.27.

knowledge which is supplemented by other discourses, such as history or geography, which further attest to the "reality" of these environments.

But if realism involves the development or acquisition of "knowledge" of the social and historical reality towards which it is intended, how is it affected by the erosion or at least problematization of knowledge which has been effected by critical theory? More precisely, is such knowledge really possible?

The first fundamental question with which this thesis is concerned emerges from this problem: what kind of relationships have been suggested between critical theory and realism? Proceeding from the idea that realism provides a kind of knowledge of reality, a number of different tendencies in literary theory have questioned and rejected realism because, it is argued, realism fails to appreciate the problems of truth and knowledge. The relationship between critical theory and realism, then, is antithetical; critical theory is implacably suspicious, while realism seems to be faithfully satisfied.

This antithesis, which was discussed earlier in this introduction, generates the second question with which we are concerned: is this critical antithesis between theory and realism necessary or desirable? As I shall try to show, the antithesis between theory and realism arises because of the seemingly objectivist or positivist model of knowledge upon which realism is said to rest. The supposed objectivity of the social world, as well as the possibility of representing it, suggest that the concept of realism is predicated upon an unshakable faith in all sorts of epistemological truths. As truth and knowledge are called into question by theorists of various persuasions, realism, if it does rest on such foundations, is necessarily implicated.

But this critical logic, I suggest, overstates the epistemological claims of realism, and in so doing jeopardizes its own critical credibility. Is it possible, then, to think of realism in terms other than those associated with one or another variety of cognitive or aesthetic positivism or (false) objectivity ? Such a revision, I shall try to show, overcomes the seeming antithesis between critical theory and realism. While the generally suspicious attitude which characterizes critical theory is not misplaced, the

targetting of realism for its supposed "faith" in the objectivity of reality and its self-satisfaction with regard to its procedures is.

To demonstrate this, I shall consider a second group of literary theories which, in various ways and to varying degrees, characterize realism as a highly problematic literary concept. The ideas discussed in Part II of this study, I shall try to show, encourage a highly critical understanding of reality, of literary representation, and of knowledge, rather than leading towards a view of realism as yet another kind of epistemological essentialism. By developing this concept of realism, I hope to show how the seeming antithesis between critical theory and realism is misplaced. It is only conceivable as long as the constituent elements of literary realism are characterized as inherently positivist or essentialist. If a different idea of what realism is can be established, this antithesis, as I shall try to show, necessarily gives way to a synthetic relationship between the two.

These, then, are the two primary tasks of this study. The first is to analyse various critical theories which have rejected realism, and to try to show how the concept of realism upon which this rejection is predicated is disingenuously reductive. The second is to analyse a second group of theories in order to arrive at a more sensitive and more critical idea of realism, and to show how such a view of realism is easily assimilated into a theoretical approach which truly merits being called critical.

These fundamental aims are supplemented by two more general propositions which I hope to establish. The first relates directly to the idea of realism. By mounting a critique of some (but by no means all) of the ways in which critical theory has been antagonistic to realism, I hope to establish that realism, while not entitled to any sort of aesthetic privilege, is still a useful literary concept, and that the familiarization of the reader with the world of the text is still a productive ingress for literary criticism. Realism has certainly never been an exclusive achievement of literary texts, even those texts which are, by almost any measure, considered to be works of realism. Since the development of the social and historical representational mode which informs what I refer to as realism many other literary forms and genres have developed, often as challenges to the conventional form of the realistic novel. As we shall see, various kinds of critical theories have turned to some of these more recent forms to

support their own theoretical challenge to realism. But while realism, as I have said, is not entitled to any sort of privilege amongst all these different aesthetic possibilities, the disrepute into which it has fallen in some critical circles is not warranted.

The second proposition regards the question of literary theory itself. The place of realism within a particular critical scheme is a useful index of its theoretical orientation, and I shall try to show that it is often with regard to the question of realism that the shortcomings of some kinds of critical theory are most clearly apparent. Within the critical schemes which are broadly antagonistic to realism there is, I suggest, a general tendency to misrepresent realism and so to proceed from what is essentially a flawed base. The credence of a particular critical theory depends upon its capacity to reveal the linguistic, philosophical, or ideological errors of a literary form of which the theory itself seems to have an erroneous view. As we shall see, the concept of reification has figured significantly in the development of contemporary critical theory, referring to a tendency to characterize as objective what is really a constructed or contrived state of affairs. Ironically, as I shall discuss below, the progenitor of the concept of reification, Georg Lukács, eventually became perhaps the most ardent defender of realism against aesthetic theories and practices which owed much to his development of the concept. Ironic also is the way in which realism, which is said to rely upon or participate in processes of social and historical reification, has itself been reified by critical theory; it has had the kind of "phantom objectivity" which Lukács saw in economic and political structures bestowed upon it by critics whose stated ambitions are to resist and even to destroy instruments and products of reification.

A reconsideration of realism, then, occasions a re-orientation of literary theory. Realism, I suggest, is an extremely complicated theoretical concept: it seeks to communicate a certain kind of knowledge about the world of experience, the real world, through the literary representation of a (largely) fictional environment to readers who generally have no direct experience of the historical milieu which is being represented. Indeed, the authors themselves often have no direct experience of the "reality" with which they are concerned; the events of *War and Peace*, for example, antedate Tolstoy's birth by about twenty years. The two novels to which we shall turn in the final part of this study offer mixed evidence on this matter.

Middlemarch is wholly set some forty years before its composition, in a period when Eliot herself was an infant. By contrast, *U.S.A.* undertakes a very broad historical sweep which extends from the late 1890s, during which Dos Passos was an infant, through the events of the Great War, of which he certainly had direct experience, to the late 1920s, a period in which he was at his most politically active, activity which is reflected in the narratives of the characters in the novel.

Given this complexity, it is curious that realism has been characterized as so wilfully simple a literary concept. The problems not only of communicating but of achieving knowledge of the "reality" of the text are not overlooked by literary realism, but highlighted by the complicated way in which it achieves its representational verisimilitude. Rather than being predicated upon naive, tendentious, or disingenuous attitudes towards reality, realism, I suggest, illustrates the problematic quality of its elements; the ideas of reality, truth, and knowledge.

Accordingly, literary theory benefits from a capacity to appreciate this idea of realism. The theorists to whom I shall turn in Part II, while they are different in their approaches and not without their problems, advance their theories from this kind of apprehension of realism. Rather than setting their critical theory against realism, they see realism as the kind of literary concept which embodies the philosophical, political, and linguistic or semantic problems with which they are concerned. Instead of defining and evaluating art according to abstract principles of truth or representational standards of accuracy, they view literary texts as illustrations of various kinds of problems, and realism in literary texts is an illustration of the problems of the very things which it seeks to represent and via which it seeks to represent them.

This view tends to suggest that realism is a peculiarly tenuous idea. Most fundamentally, perhaps, it seeks to communicate knowledge of the real world. Indeed, if realism means anything at all, the achievement of versimilitude, of a simulacrum of a stratum of the social and historical world, is crucial. Like other discourses which rely upon an idea of "truth", such as history or biography and autobiography, a plausible representation of reality is of paramount importance. Indeed, history and autobiography are telling parallels, and have often been mentioned in discussions of

realism as a literary form.[25] These other discursive genres have, like literary realism, undergone significant problematization, generating tension between, on the one hand, claims to and the need for truth and knowledge in the representational text, and the implicit problems of truth and knowledge which that text highlights.

A similar and perhaps even more heightened tension can be seen in literary realism. As I have said, it must achieve verisimilitude, it must represent something which is understood as real, but it sets about doing so largely through the "untrue" medium of fiction, into which it introduces elements of other discourses, such as history or geography. Given this seeming paradox, two very important questions arise: can the real be represented through the fictional, and can such an enterprise possibly be unaware of its own inherent problems? It is not, however, necessary to answer these questions, they merely highlight how complicated a concept literary realism is, or at least how complicated it might be seen to be once it is no longer characterized as the simple literary manifestation of dogged objectivism or positivism.

This tension between the representational aspect of realism and its problematization of representation generates a kind of critical irony. Realism must achieve verisimilitude, but in doing so it undermines its own enabling concepts. The relationship between the text and the social and historical world towards which it is intended is not one of simple correspondence but a highly fraught process of affirmation and interrogation. If realism is taken as an index of the general orientation and method of literary theories, it is possible critically to discriminate between two sorts of theoretical approaches. One sort of approach, which has been favoured in recent times, is represented by theoretical efforts to erode and to deconstruct anything which seems to rely upon some kind of claim to truth or to knowledge. The problem with such an approach is that it frequently sets its critical method against a conveniently reductive model of literary realism which, according to such theories, is an unashamed commitment to, or faith in, the most simple understandings of reality and representation. The second sort of approach is to take account of the

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[25]Martin, for example, suggests that, "[r]ealistic fiction is similar to history when it treats a large cast of characters and long stretches of time; when concentrating on a single protagonist, it approaches biography and autobiography"; *Recent Theories of Narrative*, p.75.

problematic qualities of realism. Such an approach is based upon a less vulnerable, more accurate account of realism which allows the critic both to preserve the representational claims of the text and the theoretical problems which are, in my view, an ineluctable component of realism.

(c) The problem of background: the method of this study

The issues with which this study is concerned may appear nebulous, and it is necessary, therefore, to make clear where the borders of this study are drawn, and to prefigure the method and structure through which I shall try to establish my arguments regarding realism and literary theory. As will become clear, the range of material which has been addressed has made necessary a certain amount of expository discussion to show how each theoretical approach relates to the particular critical questions with which I am concerned. In order clearly to set out this discussion, this thesis will be divided into three parts, each of which deals with a separate stage of my argument.

The first part - "Some Ends of Realism" - will undertake a critique of various literary theories which, in their efforts to be critical, have questioned or rejected literary realism. The title of this part plays on a familiar ambiguity of which, in a public lecture at the Australian National University, the philosopher John Passmore made similar use. Passmore's lecture was entitled "The End of Philosophy" under which he discussed not the termination of philosophy, but rather the aim or ambition of philosophy, suggesting that this "end" deferred the other "end" which, it has been suggested, is or at least might be nigh.

In this part I shall discuss those developments in and contributions to literary theory which have suggested that the "ends" of realism, as they are characterized within such theories, such as the establishment of standards of objectivity, or the naturalization of particular habits of language, involve uncritical assumptions about language and society. Various linguistic, poetic, philosophical and political orientations in literary theory have undertaken a critique of these "ends" and, consequently, announced the "end" of realism, at least in the social-historical mode with which we are concerned here. In some cases aesthetic alternatives have been

suggested, in others, critical theory has set about negating realism from within, arguing that the seeming realism of a text is to be disregarded because it inhibits the critical interrogation of a text. Roland Barthes' *S/Z* is, perhaps, the most well-known, and certainly the most assiduous exercise of this kind.

This first part is necessarily selective in the material with which it is concerned. I have not discussed, for example, American New Criticism, even though the "fallacies" against which Wimsatt and Beardsley argued might well be implicated in some of the "ends" of realism contemplated in this section. This part is not exhaustive because its purpose in surveying the opposition between critical theory and realism is to provide a background against which the argument of the second part of this study may be understood. By looking closely at various developments in twentieth-century critical theory, I shall try to show how the "crisis of truth" has influenced literary theory, and how, in various ways, critical theory has problematized some of the key issues with which literary realism is concerned; language, textuality, and the apprehension of reality have been among the most important ideas with which the theories discussed in Part I have been concerned.

My analysis of this material serves two essential functions. The first is clearly to introduce the antagonism between realism and various forms of critical theory. It is against this antagonism that this study is generally set. Secondly, although the kinds of thought discussed in this part differ importantly from one another, they share a tendency to claim a particularly privileged or enlightened critical position. There is, we might say, a common shape to these critical methods: they begin by identifying something which is, according to them, uncritical, and then proceed to demonstrate their preferability on the basis of the extent to which they do not fall into the same traps as their critical target. In this case we are concerned with the realistic novel, which variously suffers being excluded from the category of the artistic, consigned to historical obscurity, and characterized as the willing and effective accomplice of politically domineering ideologies. Certainly if realism were the concept identified by these tendencies, such accusations might be credible, but it is not clear that this view of realism is the only one possible. Part II of this study is devoted to arguing that other views are not only possible but preferable.

Part II - "Realism: A Critical Background" - undertakes detailed analyses of literary theories which, I suggest, are certainly critical in their approach, but which, among many other achievements, see literary realism as one kind of artistic synthesis of such a critical approach. This view, I suggest, is a powerful rebuttal of the theoretical disapprobation of realism which is surveyed in the first part, and, therefore, requires that both realism and critical theory itself should be revised. Three chapters are devoted to the analysis of the work of Georg Lukács, Erich Auerbach and Mikhail Bakhtin, in which I shall detail how the critical contributions of these theorists countenance and, certainly in Auerbach's case at least, rely upon the idea of realism as a vehicle of critical analysis.

Essentially, the ideas of truth and reality upon which realism relies are revised by these theories, and it is this revision which questions the so-called theoretical renunciation of realism and makes possible the synthesis of critical theory and realism. To present this synthesis is the central ambition of the present study, and in this part I shall seek to detail this revision and establish this synthesis. Towards this, this part will include arguments that realism can continue to be a productive concept in literary studies; that attitudes towards realism can serve as a useful index of the orientation of critical theories; and that theories which, among other things, make productive use of the concept of realism are preferable platforms from which to advance literary theories and criticism. This is not, as I have said, to suggest that realism in literature is preferable to all other aesthetic ends. I am suggesting only that realism is one critical ingress among others, the possibilities of which are in danger of being overlooked.

I shall seek to establish these claims by exploring in detail a range of works by each of the critical authors considered. In the cases of Lukács and Auerbach, I shall place their clearly expressed preference for realism against the background of the development of their critical positions. By trying to show how their preferences for realism emerge from this background, I intend to make clear that the nebulous idea of realism has always carried with it a sensitive appreciation of the problematic nature of the ideas - such as ideas of history and society - which it involves. In different ways, and to different degrees of persuasiveness, both Lukács and

Auerbach turn to realism precisely because it embodies interpretive problems of the apprehension and representation of reality. The determinate representation of the social world emerges for them from a theoretical background which critically recognizes the ineluctable problems of determinacy, representation, and the social world.

In the case of Mikhail Bakhtin, the relationship between realism and his critical *oeuvre* is less straightforward. While Bakhtin did consider realism, he also considered a great many other things, and realism does not occupy the same position of importance as it does in the works of Lukács and Auerbach. My approach will therefore be to explore a wide range of Bakhtin's critical texts, and try to show how they contribute to the theory of realism which I am seeking to develop. My analysis will seek to establish that Bakhtin's method involves the development of a series of conceptual figures which negotiate between, in a very broad sense, determinacy and indeterminacy. I shall then try to show how the realistic novel can be considered another such figure, with a similarly critical background.

These ideas will be developed in due course, and I shall try to redress the question-begging simplicity of this brief account. At this stage I hope only to offer an introduction to the theoretical ideas with which I am concerned, and to prefigure the claims which I shall be making and the theoretical propositions which I hope to establish in the course of this study. The detailed and sometimes lengthy studies of various critical authors which follow are consequences of these propositions. Because my aim is to reconsider the realistic novel against the background of twentieth-century literary and critical theory, it is necessary to explore that background in some detail, to try to understand what tendencies in critical theory have motivated the theoretical "end" of realism. When, in Part II, I seek to establish a different way of considering the relationship between the two, my method has been to show how realism emerges from theoretical backgrounds which, using the idea of the critical established above, certainly warrant being called critical.

In Part III - "Reading Realism: Theory and Practice" - I shall analyse two literary texts - *Middlemarch* by George Eliot, and *U.S.A.* by John Dos Passos - to test and support the theoretical claims made in Part II. In each case, I

shall try to show how an acknowledgement the realism of the text is a productive ingress into the analysis of the texts, rather than an impediment. These claims, and the critical position which they advocate, are, as I shall try to make clear, the proposed synthesis of the two seemingly antagonistic positions outlined in Parts I and II. I hope to preserve the relentless critical spirit which has contributed to the radical questioning attitude evinced by contemporary critical theory while acknowledging the need for and ineluctability of the ideas of reality and of realism. I see literary realism as a complicated theoretical figure which makes possible such a reconciliation. This study, then, is a reassertion of the importance of the idea of realistic representation, and also an exploration into the contentious situation, the "fraught background" of contemporary literary theory.

(e) Terms and conditions: the scope of this study

With such broad concepts and categories as realism and critical theory on the loose, it is also necessary to exercise some caution and restraint with regard to the ambition and scope of this study. Certainly what I mean by realism cannot apply to every novel which has ever been called or considered realistic. The representation of social, historical environments and of the lives of individuals within those environments, is, as I have indicated, a kind of loose definition of what I mean, in this study, by realism. Rather than a very close focus upon individual lives, or a highly subjective representational focus, realism concentrates on a fairly broad stratum of social life from a broad, middle-distance representational perspective. As I have said, this is the general representational structure most commonly associated with nineteenth-century novelists such as Balzac, Stendhal and Tolstoy, among, of course, countless others.

But the techniques associated with nineteenth-century realism do not exhaust the possibilities for representing social and historical reality, a point borne out by the vast differences between the two novels which are discussed in Part III of this study.

Middlemarch is certainly closer to most conventional ideas of realism than *U.S.A.*, but the two novels are similar insofar as each is concerned with the representation of a social and historical milieu. On the one hand,

then, these two novels are both examples of what I am calling realism, but on the other hand, the differences between them are significant enough to necessitate several qualifications. My conception of realism, which incorporates these two novels, is clearly very general, and, therefore, cannot claim to be in any way definitive or absolute. There are other ways in which realism can be defined, ways which might include one but not the other of these texts, or perhaps neither. Certainly, if parts of *U.S.A.* were taken in isolation, they would seem radically to question whether the novel should be spoken of as realistic at all, a question to which we shall return in due course.

The social and historical representation which characterizes realism for my purposes must be taken not so much as a definition of realism as simply one way in which realism might be understood. Similarly, the theoretical view of realism which is developed in Part II of this thesis, particularly insofar as it stands as a kind of corrective response to other theoretical views of realism, cannot be considered an authoritative account of the literary and philosophical properties of realism. Rather, it is again only one possible way of understanding a literary concept which, while it necessarily contradicts other understandings, doesn't exhaust the concept or claim to provide a definitive theoretical account.

These qualifications might seem to betray an excess of caution, but I think them necessary, and preferable to exaggerated claims for the reference or applicability of one's theoretical suggestions. Realism, and representation in general, go to the heart of the mysterious and as yet elusive relationship between literature and reality, and it may be possible to characterize any literary work as, at some level, realistic. Without some preliminary qualifications, claims about the nature and function of realism might seem to be attempts to define, or even as claims to have ultimately seized upon, the very nature of literature and of reality, and such claims are usually as short-lived as they are overstated. Indeed, the very need for caution and qualifications might be seen as evidence of the complicated issues which arise when the concept of realism is carefully considered, which renders its critical rejection all the more premature.

In what follows, then, my claims must be understood to be covered by these caveats. Nonetheless, there are points to be made. By articulating a

theoretical concept of realism which, in contrast to a prevailing antithesis between realism and critical theory, sees their methods as generally congenial, I hope to offer a way of thinking about realism which illuminates useful critical possibilities for the reading of novels which undertake to represent social and historical reality. Rather than an exhausted literary mode or an outdated aesthetic standard, realism provides an ingress both into theoretical debates and into literary criticism, and in this study I shall try to suggest ways in which these avenues may be pursued.

I

Some Ends of Realism

The three chapters which make up this part are concerned, as I have mentioned, with "ends." Many different results, objects, and intentions of realism have been posited and what the different approaches discussed in each of these chapters have in common is that they suggest that these "ends" of realism constitute a denial or rejection of a critical attitude. On the basis of these ends - what are seen as realism's claims to absolute truth, to authority, and so forth - the "end" of realism is announced or called for. Realism, Catherine Belsey, to whom we shall turn in Chapter Three, tells us, "is no longer tenable."[1]

My argument with this position, or, rather, the different positions surveyed in this part, is not simply a matter of pointing out what I see as their errors or shortcomings and then relying upon these as the disproof of their critical validity. The critical dimension of these various enterprises is something which is preserved in the theoretical position towards which this thesis is intended. But what seems to be a necessary antithesis between critical theory and realism is, as I shall try to show, based on a view of realism which overlooks the complexity of realism as a literary phenomenon.

My critique of these various theoretical movements is intended to identify what seem to be productive contributions to literary theory while challenging what I consider mistaken premises or conclusions. In some cases, the assimilation of the theoretical arguments is more pronounced than the challenge to them, and in others the balance is tilted towards a more polemic refutation of claims and concepts. Generally, however, the aim of this part is to introduce the seeming opposition between critical theory and realism against which I shall make my own claims regarding the congeniality between the two. The "ends" of realism, I shall argue, are not necessarily those attributed to it by many of the theorists discussed in

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[1]Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (London: Methuen, 1980), p.46.

this part and, therefore, the necessary "end" of realism is, like Mark Twain's famous obituary, greatly exaggerated.

The following critique, however, is not only concerned to address the end of realism. The shortcomings of these theoretical contributions, or at least those areas where their critical focus is less sharp than elsewhere, highlight the dangers of holding to too narrow an idea of critical or literary theory. Paul de Man's essay on what he calls the "resistance" to theory, for example, seems to countenance only a very specific idea of what is theoretical. The tendency to characterize as theoretical only the most recent developments in literary theory, or the most radical, limits and, I suggest, impoverishes literary studies in general by positing exaggerated dichotomies of which the one between realism and theory which occasions the present study is one example. That such dichotomies, rather than one or another of the poles of them, are untenable is, perhaps, illustrated by the case of the theoretical currency of the work of James Joyce.

Joyce has often been used as a kind of index of the critical in literature, and of departures from realism. He is cited approvingly by numerous theorists of various persuasions, with the notable exception of Georg Lukács, who cited him disapprovingly for much the same reasons. Joyce's intellectual genealogy includes, among others, of course, the Renaissance thinker Giambattista Vico, a forebear whom he shares with the German theorist Erich Auerbach, whose major work, *Mimesis*, is explicitly concerned with realism.

Now these coinciding influences in Auerbach and Joyce certainly do not establish any sort of equivalence between the two figures, and it would be ill-advised to make too much of the conceptual connection. But the connection does highlight the complexities of what is called literary theory, and shows how some arguments which claim to be theoretical actually lack a critical edge, a deficiency which can lead to poorly sustained conclusions. Literary theory itself must be read and interpreted, must be subject to critical analysis, in order for theory to maintain its critical edge.

These are the points to be addressed in Part I, which is divided into three chapters, each of which deals with a different area of critical theory, and a

different stage of the present argument. In order thoroughly to take account of various kinds of what we might call anti-realistic theory, each of these chapters includes fairly extended analyses of the works of various theorists. The length and detail of this survey of different theories of realism is necessary for the establishment of my two main propositions. I shall not only try to show what has been said of realism, but also to identify the fundamental models or concepts of critical theory which are implied by these various positions. It is not simply a matter of disproving various claims about realism, but rather a critique of these fundamental concepts with which we are concerned. In the third and final chapter of this part I shall turn more specifically to the shortcomings of the critical theories discussed in chapters 1 and 2 to illustrate how their misapprehension of realism is an emblem of fundamental critical misconstructions which require revision. Thus, this first part establishes a background against which, in Part II I shall make my two arguments; the first argues for a revision of the concept of realism, and the second for a concomitant reorientation of critical theory.

At the conclusion of this part, I hope to have made clear that the renunciation of realism, the end, is only necessary, or, rather, conceivable, if certain claims about what realism is and does are accepted. These claims. I suggest, are more a caricature of realism than the products of a critical investigation, and therefore both realism and critical theory itself need to be reconsidered. Such an investigation, and the further development of my argument, will be taken up in Part II.

- 1 -

Language, textuality, and representation

> Words, as is well known, are the great foes of reality.
> - Joseph Conrad

That words are an imperfect representational medium is certainly, by now, fairly well established. Conrad's anxious narrator, who delivers the line which serves to introduce this chapter laments his over-familiarity with words; it compromises, he seems to think, his grasp of reality. In this chapter we shall be concerned with three critical tendencies which, in a sense, have acted on the tenet that there is, to resort to an overworked phrase, a gap between words and things, of which Plato, in his critique of mimesis, was clearly aware.

Arguably, realism has always had a sense of its own textuality and its own language. Even Aristotelian mimesis, which can be considered a distant predecessor of realism in the novel, countenanced the problems of the text. Later, G.H. Lewes, whose association with the realistic novel was certainly stronger than that of Aristotle, placed this important qualification on artistic realism:

> Art is a Representation of Reality - a Representation which, inasmuch as it is not the thing itself, but only represents it, must necessarily be limited by the nature of its medium; the canvas of the painter, the marble of the sculptor, the chords of the musician, and the language of the writer ...[1]

The theorists discussed in this section share Lewes' feeling that these limitations, in this case of language, are being overlooked. Both Aristotle and Lewes belong, one might argue, to a different critical environment than the present, but in the twentieth-century the representational limitations of language have been much discussed and debated. We might recall, through Tzvetan Todorov, Paul Valéry's dictum that literature is

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[1]G.H Lewes, "Realism and Idealism" in Alice R. Kaminsky ed., *Literary Criticism of George Henry Lewes* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), p.87.

no more than the extension of certain properties of language.[2] This idea gives rise to the affirmation, or at least acknowledgment, of language, and the complexities of language, as important aspects of literary realism.

An emphasis on language informs the three theoretical approaches discussed in this section. I have not taken these approaches in strict chronological order, but rather according to the extent to which they may be considered hostile to realism, and the degree of problematization which they bring to the questions with which this study is concerned. Each is concerned to encourage an awareness of the language of realism, to redress what, according to them, is a kind of taking-for-granted of language, a wilful neglect of the gap between words and things which, they suggest, provides the very interest of both words and things. This, we might say, is the *critical* project of theories which rely on the problems of language to approach the study of literature: to resurrect language and the use of language, a task which, in the view of some of these theorists, requires the end of realism.

(a) Neo-classicism: Booth and the ancient art of rhetoric

Wayne C. Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, according to the preface to the first edition, is concerned with "the rhetorical resources available to the writer ... as he tries, consciously or unconsciously, to impose his fictional world upon the reader."[3] In particular, Booth is concerned with techniques and textual devices which betray the hand of the author. No matter how much it may seem that fiction is "showing" its material - to use Booth's strongly Aristotelian terminology - close analysis will always reveal that it is "telling" its story. "[T]he author's judgement', Booth claims, "is always present, always evident to anyone who knows how to look for it"(*RF*, p.20).

Booth's analysis of technique proceeds by challenging what he calls "General Rules" of narrative, the first of which is particularly germane to the present inquiry - "True Novels Must Be Realistic". Booth is, perhaps, overstating the extent to which this maxim imposes itself, and perhaps

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[2] See Tzvetan Todorov, *Poétique de la prose* , p.32.

[3] Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 2nd ed. (Middlesex: Peregrine Books, 1987), p.xiii. The preface to the first edition is included in this edition. References to this work (hereafter *RF*), will be included in the text.

ironically, but his discussion is nonetheless instructive. Beginning with the presence or otherwise, in a work of fiction, of the author's voice, Booth illustrates how debate regarding the appropriate manifestation of authorial presence was often conducted in terms of what he (Booth) called "the realistic illusion":

> Perhaps a majority of attacks on the author's voice have been in the name of making the book seem 'real.'(*RF*, p.40)

Discussing the extent to which the position of the author's voice - and associated narratological elements - bears upon the intensity of the realistic illusion, Booth rehearses the claims of other critics; notably, Ian Watt, Henry James, and Jean-Paul Sartre. He says of Watt that he proceeds from an "all-pervasive assumption ... that 'realism of presentation' is a good thing in itself"(*RF*, p.41). He writes of James that he works towards "a general rhetoric in the service of realism"(*RF*, p.50). Sartre's aesthetic, Booth notes, is more ambivalent than those of James and Watt, countenancing a radical aesthetic break, away from the rhetorical techniques associated with the realistic illusion. The narratological complexities of the author's voice do not, however, entirely deny the possibility of realistic representation. Booth writes:

> In the general assumption that a novel should seem real, James and Sartre would probably be joined by most novelists from the beginning of fiction. In the assumption that a realistic effect is worth the sacrifice of most if not all other virtues, they would be joined by many novelists and critics in this century.(*RF*, p.53)

In 1961, when the first edition of *The Rhetoric of Fiction* appeared, such assertions were perhaps more supportable than in contemporary literary studies. Even so, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* is noteworthy for the extent to which it placed technical questions at the heart of the analysis of fiction, including the question of realistic representation. Booth's neo-Aristotelian poetics challenged many stylistic prescriptions - undermining the claims of authors/theorists to be moving away from artifice towards "truth" - and argued against a transparency theory of literary representation. His criticism, however, doesn't entertain the radical problematization of referentiality which has made the realistic assumptions of which Booth writes highly contentious. Nonetheless, Booth's critical statements which

are aimed at an analysis of the rhetorical properties of fiction are a useful example of how problems of language are implicated in the idea of the realistic novel. The general rules against which Booth argues can be understood as uncritical assumptions which fail to appreciate the complexity of this implication. Like his predecessor Aristotle, Booth is concerned with rhetoric, with the persuasive properties of language. His study is, in a sense, an effort to focus attention on the art of rhetoric, and to encourage a kind of literary criticism which, through an awareness of the rhetoric of fiction, holds at arm's length the assumptions which inform what he calls general rules.

Booth's revival of rhetoric is, of course, only one way of returning to language in literary theory. By trying to effect a return to rhetoric, Booth's challenge to realism is not essentially against realism itself, but rather against attempts to excise rhetoric from fiction, either in the name of realism or in pursuit of some sort of artistic purity.[4] But earlier returns to language, in a different critical environment to that within which Booth made his statements, constituted a more profound, or at least more polemic, challenge to realism.

(b) Russian Formalism: the resurrection of the word

In the early part of the twentieth-century, two groups of scholars in the fledgling Soviet Union began to outline aesthetic theories that seriously challenged views of literature which validated realistic aesthetics. Prominent amongst these scholars was Viktor Shklovsky who argued, according to Wallace Martin, that "the realism of fiction is a product of technique, not of scientific observation of reality."[5] Working against the importance of representational aesthetics in an earlier generation of Russian critics, Shklovsky's Formalism worked upon the following principle:

> In order to transform an object into a fact of art, it is necessary first to withdraw it from the domain of life.[6]

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[4]See *RF*, p.96.
[5]Martin, *Recent Theories of Narrative*, p.48.
[6]Viktor Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose* (1925), trans. Benjamin Sher (Elmwood Park, Ill.: Dalkey Archive Press, 1990), p.61.

To accomplish this withdrawal, Shklovsky proposed an artistic strategy of what has come to be called "defamiliarization" - translated more literally as "making strange." The revitalization of artistic perception which was implicit in defamiliarization was the defining characteristic of the literary - a characteristic attributed, more than a century earlier, to poetry, by Wordsworth, who suggested that in poetry, "ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way".[7] For Shklovsky, defamiliarization serves a number of purposes, not least of which is to distinguish between literary and non-literary verbal structures; it serves, as Fredric Jameson puts it, "as the enabling act which permits literary theory to come into being".[8] Fundamentally, Shklovsky's project was to achieve what he called, in an early brochure, "The Resurrection of the Word,"[9] an interruption of the habit of passing from words to their putative meaning; or, in the language of structuralism, Formalism's conceptual heir, from signifier to signified.

If we set aside the avant-gardism associated with defamiliarization, and its attendant ideas of literature and literary history[10] we can begin to think generally about the structure of Shklovsky's theories, and so to consider how their anti-representational bias fits into the present study. In working away from the sociological approach to literature, of which realistic representation was an important element, Shklovsky was arguing for a *critical* dimension of literary studies which questioned habitual patterns of cultural communication, themselves an extension of fundamental problems of perception. In "Art as Technique", he states his position on the problem of perception:

> If we start to examine the general laws of perception, we see that as perception becomes habitual, it becomes

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[7]"Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*" in *William Wordsworth*, ed. Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p.597.

[8]Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), p.52.

[9]Cited in M.M. Bakhtin/P.N. Medvedev, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics*, trans. Albert J. Wehrle (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1985), p.54.

[10]See Jameson, *The Prison-House, p.52*

> automatic. Thus, for example, all of our habits retreat into the area of the unconsciously automatic.[11]

Shklovsky sets himself resolutely against such automatism. He continues:

> And so life is reckoned as nothing. Habitualization destroys works, clothes, furniture, one's wife, and the fear of war ... And art exists that one may recover the sensation of life ... The technique of art is to make objects "unfamiliar," to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. *Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important.*[12]

Shklovsky's aesthetic seems, then, to be a-representational, which is consistent with the Formalist affinity with Russian and early Soviet avant-garde movements. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that alongside his interest in Laurence Sterne he manages to pursue his theories in Tolstoy's fiction, reversing a critical tendency to characterize Tolstoy's work as, among other things, realistic.

Shklovsky's position is an extreme one. His theory turns on a distinction between the habitual, which he says destroys life, and the artistic, which seems to approach some sort of aesthetic essentialism. Only in the rarified, challenging art work, he suggests, can life be recovered, and in order for this to be achieved a radical break between art and life must be effected. Realistic aesthetics, which necessarily rely upon a continuity of art and life, run contrary to this aesthetic program.

Boris Tomashevsky evinces a similar concern, pointedly contrasting "realistic motivation" to "artistic motivation":

> We demand an element of "illusion" in any work ... our perception of it must be accompanied by a feeling

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[11]Viktor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique"(1917) in Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis eds and trans., *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), p.11.
[12]Shklovsky, "Art as Technique", p.12.

> that what happens in it is "real." The naive reader feels this with extraordinary force ...[13]

Even "experienced readers," Tomashevsky argues, demand "conformity to reality": greater aesthetic awareness does not preclude a "need for realistic illusion."[14] Predating Booth, Tomashevsky uses the same phrase that Booth used in his analysis of literary technique.

Tomashevsky goes on to make more explicit the opposition between realistic and artistic motivation:

> A system of realistic motivation quite often includes a denial of artistic motivation.[15]

He then introduces the idea of defamiliarization, as "a special instance of artistic motivation",[16] although, as with Shklovsky, Tomashevsky is able to locate artistic motivation in seemingly "realistic" literary structures, blurring the distinction between the realistic and the artistic. Tomashevsky's sense of "realistic" as against "artistic" motivation involves the same kind of distinction as that which Shklovsky posited between art and life. Realistic motivation relies upon the habitual, whereas artistic motivation works towards the pure essence of the artistic. Only when this purity is achieved is it possible for art to exercise a salutary effect on life.

Shklovsky and Tomashevsky set their aesthetic theories against "naive" reading; by complicating the reading process, they argue, the habitual reception upon which realistic techniques rely can be overcome. Form is more important than content, the work more important than the reality it purports to represent.

Another Formalist, Roman Jakobson, who worked in Moscow with Tomashevsky,[17] considered the idea of realism more directly. In an essay

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[13]Boris Tomashevsky, "Thematics", in Lemon and Reis, *Russian Formalist Criticism*, p.80.
[14]Tomashevsky, "Thematics", p.81.
[15]Tomashevsky, "Thematics", p.85.
[16]Tomashevsky, "Thematics", p.85.
[17]For matters relating to the historical development of Formalism, see primarily Victor Ehrlich, *Russian Formalism: History-Doctrine* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965). See also Tzvetan Todorov, *Literature and Its Theorists: A Personal View of Twentieth-Century Criticism*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987).

which appeared in 1921, "On Realism In Art", Jakobson took critical issue with the idea of realistic representation. His initial target is what he calls "slipshod ... terminology" in literary history. Among other terms, he writes that

> the term 'realism' ... fared especially badly. The uncritical use of this word, so very elusive in meaning, has had fateful consequences.
> What is realism as understood by the theoretician of art ? It is an artistic trend which *aims at conveying reality* as closely as possible and which strives for maximum verisimilitude. We call realistic those works which we feel accurately depict life by displaying verisimilitude.[18]

Jakobson argues that the idea of realistic representation which is supposed to be inferred from the term "realism" has dimensions of ambiguity which a single, consistent term cannot begin to explore. He begins by articulating three meanings of realism: realism as conceived by the author; as perceived by the reader; and as characteristic of a specific artistic current of the nineteenth-century. Beginning with this tri-partite division, Jakobson thus both problematizes the term, and hints at the complexities of its supposed defining characteristic: representation. Where, he asks, is the realistic standard of verisimilitude located: in the author; in the reader; or in literary tradition ? In this, Jakobson anticipates developments in literary theory from the "fallacies" outlined by Wimsatt and Beardsley to Foucault's critique of the author-function and Barthes' move from "work to text." In doing so, Jakobson shows not only that the terminology or nomenclature of the literary representation of reality is problematic, but also that the very idea of realism is difficult clearly to understand.

Jakobson further develops this problematic by reasserting the figurative capacity of language - which parallels the idea of defamiliarization - and by asserting this idea as a motivating force in literary history and in the concept of realistic representation. His original tri-partite distinction is thus augmented by his claim that both deformation of and adherence to

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Todorov, of course, was instrumental in the dissemination of Formalism through his edition and translation of Formalist essays into French in 1965.

[18]Roman Jakobson, "On Realism in Art", trans. Karol Magassy, in his *Language in Literature*, ed. Krystyna Pomoroska and Stephen Rudy (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1987), p.20. Further references to this essay will be included in the text.

artistic and textual codes have been characterized as "realistic." Jakobson's anticipation of later critical developments emerges again:

> The words of yesterday's narrative grow stale; now the item is described by the features that were yesterday held to be the least descriptive ... features that were scarcely noticed.("On Realism", p.22)

Jakobson prefigures the different theoretical accounts of the transition from phase to phase of representational aesthetics offered by Northrop Frye and Erich Auerbach, and also bears out Jameson's discussion of how Formalism redefines literary history "as a series of abrupt discontinuities."[19] This revolutionary model of literary history, of course, coincides with the Formalist involvement in an aesthetic and critical avant-garde.

Jakobson argues that these complexities militate against continued use of the word "realism." "Whoever senses faithfulness to life in Racine does not find it in Shakespeare, and vice-versa"("On Realism", p.23). This historicity, he says, "brings the extreme relativism of the concept of 'realism' into sharp relief"("On Realism", p.24). But Jakobson's analysis also highlights a problem which goes beyond mere terminology, and for which his (ironic) conclusion - realisms A_1, A_2, B, C etc. - doesn't account. Aesthetic forms, and shifts in aesthetic conventions - Jakobson mentions Symbolism, Futurism and Expressionism - are predicated upon changing understandings of reality itself, changing epistemologies, a radical idea which has since provoked a great deal of critical debate.

In terms simply of literature, Jakobson says that this dialectical drive towards greater representational accuracy generated "posthumous criticism ... (which) periodically questioned the realism of Gogol', Dostoevskij, Tolstoj, Turgenev, and Ostrovskij"("On Realism", p.25). Discussing the aesthetic tendencies of this nineteenth-century "school," Jakobson notes the importance of the "unessential detail," a figurative device which generates the impression of representational fidelity:

> If the hero of an eighteenth-century novel encounters a passer-by, it may be taken for granted that the latter is of no importance ... But it is obligatory in Gogol' or

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[19]Jameson, *The Prison-House*, p52

> Tolstoj or Dostoevskij that the hero first meet an unimportant and ... superfluous passer-by, and that their resulting conversation should have no bearing on the story ... [s]uch a device is frequently thought to be realistic.("On Realism", p.25)

Jakobson - again prefiguring a similar idea in subsequent literary theory; specifically Barthes' essay "L'effet du réel" - demonstrates, with this idea, the interconnection between textuality - the persistence of the unessential figure - and realistic representation - the unessential detail indicates a breadth of descriptive detail which is more "realistic" than more narrowly focused narrative. The form, again, is crucial, and prior to the content. Like Shklovsky and Tomashevsky, Jakobson is calling for more *critical* reading and interpretive practices which move away from face-value acceptance of literary representations, and towards which this kind of formal interrogation is the first step.

The tenets of the Formalists exercised a strong influence upon subsequent developments in literary theory, and particularly on French structuralism,[20] with which Formalism is linked principally through Jakobson.[21] The resurrection of the word, of which Shklovsky wrote, and which, we have seen, gives rise to serious critical questions about realism and representation, later became the resurrection of the sign, a critical development which was similarly to confront the vexed problem of realism.

(c) Structuralism and the reality effect

Structuralism and the question of realistic representation reached an important conjuncture in 1968: the Parisian journal *Communications*

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[20]Jameson writes: "French Structuralism is related to Russian Formalism, less as nephew to uncle, in Shklovsky's phrase, than as crossed cousins within an endogamous kinship system"; *The Prison-House*, p.101.

[21]Jakobson left Moscow for Prague, moving to the United States during WW II. His relationship with structuralism (particularly with Levi-Strauss) is well-documented. He is cited by, among others, Todorov (see "L'héritage méthodologique du Formalisme" and "Langage et littérature" in his *Poétique de la prose*) and Roland Barthes ("Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives" in his *Image - Music - Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977)). His influence upon Barthes seems to have been profound, considering the similarities between Jakobson's essay and Barthes' "L'effet du réel".

devoted an issue to *la vraisemblable* - verisimilitude.[22] Edited by Tzvetan Todorov, and including essays by Roland Barthes, Gerard Genette, Julia Kristeva, film theorist Christian Metz, and Todorov himself, this publication embodied the burgeoning critical antagonism towards the idea of realistic representation. This collection of articles represents a forceful expression of how literary theory was challenging traditional literary values, resulting in the critical problematization from which literary mimesis has become indissociable.

Most influential, perhaps, of the *Communications* essays is Roland Barthes' "L'effet du réel" - the reality effect.[23] Concerned to reveal what Barthes calls the "referential illusion," Barthes' essay echoes strongly Jakobson's "On Realism in Art", particularly in its exploitation of the "unessential detail." Barthes begins by counterposing literary description with structural analysis. Flaubert and Michelet - two authors whom he cites - produce - like many others, he adds - data and descriptive details which, under structural analysis, are seemingly "useless." These features of a text, Barthes argues, seem to be independent of or resistant to what he calls "meaning":

> the irreducible residues of functional analyses ... denote what is commonly called 'concrete reality'(casual movements, transitory attitudes, insignificant objects, redundant words). Unvarnished 'representation of reality', a naked account of 'what is' (or was), thus looks like a resistance to meaning, a resistance which confirms the great mythical opposition between the true-to-life (the living) and the intelligible.[24]

Barthes' argument must be placed in the context of the structuralist "resurrection of the sign." The seeming resistance of certain textual features to functional analysis, he argues, constitutes a claim that "concrete reality" is beyond, or prior to, meaning. Understood structurally, this means that the signifying processes[25] of meaning production do not

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[22]*Communications* 11 (Paris: Seuil, 1968).
[23]Reissued in Tzvetan Todorov ed., *French literary theory today.*
[24]"The reality effect", p.14. Further references to this essay will be included in the text
[25]Barthes' notion of the sign derives from the linguistic, more specifically, Saussurean, origin of structuralist thought. Barthes' essays, "To Write: An Intransitive Verb", and "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative" detail this genealogy.

constitute "reality"; rather, it exists in a kind of pre-signifying, pre-discursive immutability or self-evidence. Barthes argues that nothing, including reality, is prior to "meaning," understood in its structuralist sense. To advance this claim he considers the conceptual transition to what he calls the "new 'vraisemblance.'"

Barthes recalls the classical distinction between poetry, or narrative, characterized as *vraisemblable*, and history, which is simply *vrai*, or, rather, real. "Since antiquity," he writes, "the 'real' and history have gone together"("Reality effect", p.15). In modernity, however, a kind of collusion has developed between history and narrative. Barthes notes the historical contemporaneity of objective historiography and realism in literature, as well as a developing tendency towards hard evidential modes of representation:

> It is logical, therefore, that realism in literature should have been, give or take a few decades, contemporaneous with the rise of 'objective' history, to which should be added the present-day development of techniques, activities, and institutions based on an endless need to authenticate the real ... [T]he 'real' is assumed not to need any independent justification ... it is powerful enough to negate any notion of 'function' ... it can be expressed without there being any need for it to be integrated into a structure ... the having been there of things is a sufficient reason for speaking them.("Reality effect", p.15)

This conceptual convergence of history and narrative gives birth to the new verisimilitude - realism. But, Barthes is arguing, this seeming self-evidence is not prior to structure, but merely part of another structure. In order to make this clear, Barthes analyses semiotically the "concrete detail"; reasserting the signifying nature of the narrative detail undermines the idea that the real exists independently of structure:

> at the very moment when these details are supposed to denote reality directly, all that they do, tacitly, is signify it. Flaubert's barometer, Michelet's little door, say, in the last analysis, only this: *we are the real*. It is the category of the 'real', and not its various contents, which is being signified; in other words, the very absence of the signified, to the advantage of the

> referent ... becomes the true signifier of realism. An 'effet du réel', (a reality effect) is produced, which is the basis of that unavowed 'vraisemblance' which forms the aesthetic of all the standard works of modernity.("Reality effect", p.16)

This reality effect, Barthes says, serves to make representation seem like a "pure encounter between the object and its expression"("Reality effect", p.16). Such purity, however, according to Barthes, is unachievable; resurrecting the sign, insisting upon its structural nature, questions, Barthes insists, radically and necessarily, "the age old aesthetic of 'representation'"("Reality effect", p.16).

Barthes' "reality effect" argues against what I have called the seeming self-evidence of realistic representation, an idea which characterizes the modern (as distinct from the ancient, a transition which Todorov, as we shall see, details) concept of verisimilitude. A similar argument may be distilled from Todorov's lengthy introduction to *Communications* 11 - an extended version of which appeared several years later in his collection of essays *Poétique de la prose*. The idea of self-evidence, or, at least of evidence, is immediately implicated in Todorov's essay as he introduces the idea of verisimilitude through an ancient Sicilian legal dispute. The disputed occurrence, Todorov says, did not, of course, take place before the judges; their task, therefore, was, on the basis of the testimonies (*les récits*) of the contestants, not to *establish* the truth, but to *approach* and *give an impression* of the truth.

This contest gave rise, Todorov says, to the science of rhetoric, and to the concept of verisimilitude, both of which Todorov enlists in his structuralist project to demonstrate, against a predominant habit of thought, that "words are not simply the transparent names of things."[26]

> It is a matter of taking language out of its illusory transparence, of learning to perceive it and, at the same time, to study the techniques which it uses to disappear, to exist no more before our eyes, like Wells'

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[26]Tzvetan Todorov, *Poétique de la prose* , p.92, trans. mine. Further references will be abbreviated and included in the text. Structuralism is not, of course, the only theoretical movement to advance this claim. Many branches of linguistics have been concerned with this idea and Plato's *Cratylus* - a later dialogue - turns on this very question.

> invisible man swallowing his chemical potion.(*Poétique*, p.92)

Todorov's analysis of verisimilitude, like Barthes', countenances the transition from the "old" to the "new"; the slide from a distinction between verisimilitude and truth to a conflation or equation of the two. He proceeds to break down the idea of verisimilitude into four senses. The first, he argues, is "its most naive sense of conforming to reality"(*Poétique*, p.94). This is quite close to Barthes' formulation - a pure encounter between an object and its expression - and Todorov is quick to discredit this naive understanding of the concept. He cites classical poetics to support his argument:

> Corax, the first theoretician of verisimilitude, had already gone further (than this naive sense): for him verisimilitude was not a relation with the real (as if it were the truth), but with that which the majority of people believed to be real, in other words, with public opinion.(*Poétique*, p.94)

This classical idea is Todorov's second sense of verisimilitude:

> The second sense is that of Plato and Aristotle: verisimilitude is the rapport between a particular text and another, general and diffuse, which we call 'public opinion.'(*Poétique*, p.94)

The third sense of which Todorov speaks concerns what might be called generic verisimilitude, the conventions imposed upon the reception of particularly stylized works.

The fourth and final sense is of particular resonance:

> Finally, in our days, another usage has become predominant: we speak of the verisimilitude of a work to the extent that it tries to makes us believe that it conforms to reality and not to its own laws; in other words, verisimilitude is the mask which dresses up the laws of the text, and which we are supposed to take for a relation with reality.(*Poétique*, p.94)

This idea evinces the critique of verisimilitude in which Todorov and Barthes are participating. The conventional aspects of verisimilitude - its

own laws - are obfuscated, "masked", thus suggesting that the text has a simple relation to reality. This is, of course, part of the re-emphasis of language which is central to the structuralist project: Barthes' notion of intransitive writing and Todorov's stated intention to explain and illustrate Valéry's statement regarding language and literature characterize this movement.

Two aspects of Todorov's analysis are particularly noteworthy. Firstly, a kind of deception is implied; verisimilitude, he says, is a "mask." This implication develops into the notion of naturalization: textual properties become "naturalized" so as to seem given, natural, rather than conventional.[27] This is the obfuscation of textuality against which linguistically-oriented poetics - such as those of Todorov and Barthes - are working.

The second element of Todorov's analysis which warrants further attention is his invocation of "public opinion." Todorov is not, of course, alone in this. The structuralist critic Gérard Genette uses a similar definition of verisimilitude: "the idea that the public has of the true or possible.'"[28] In different ways, Shklovsky and, incidentally, Northrop Frye might also be said to share this point of view, insofar as their analyses of "realism" countenance changing perceptions and standards of verisimilitude.[29] A question, however, remains, or, rather, demands attention: how is this "public opinion" to be measured ? Clearly, neither Todorov nor Genette anticipated very wide public surveys or opinion polls to determine whether more people than not thought that *Le rouge et le noir* and *Madame Bovary* were realistic where *Diary of a madman* and *Great Expectations* were not. Nonetheless, their arguments seem to presuppose that in any given milieu there is going to be some uniformity of response.

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[27]A detailed account of this development is given in Jonathan Culler's primer of structuralist thought. See Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), Chapter 7.

[28]Gérard Genette, "Structuralism and literary criticism", in David Lodge ed., *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader* (Harlow: Longman, 1988), p.72.

[29]In *Anatomy of Criticism*, Frye lists a sequence of literary works and then suggests that "each work is 'romantic' compared to its successors and 'realistic' compared to its predecessors"; see Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (1957; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), p.49.

Addressing this difficulty requires us to take account of how this structuralist interrogation of verisimilitude marks the final stage of how the ideas of textuality discussed here call for a departure from an aesthetic of realism. The close focus on textual codes and conventions, exemplified most completely by Barthes' *S/Z* and Gérard Genette's sustained structuralist analysis of Proust in *Narrative Discourse*, culminates in the distinction between the *lisible*, and the *scriptible*. Texts which are merely *lisible* - readable - seek to foreclose the possibilities of linguistic signification; they seek to make language transparent. *Scriptible* -writable - texts, on the other hand, leave room for, indeed require, a kind of play of signification, a realization of the nature and role of language in literature.

The foreclosure of the readable has profound implications for the idea of "public opinion" as the normative reference point of verisimilitude. Coupled with the idea of naturalization, this public opinion seems to collude with the idea of the readable. In other words, it forecloses the possibilities of a text in order to maintain its verisimilitude. Public opinion, then, is implicated both as the agent of textual foreclosure and as something which is itself foreclosed. This double foreclosure makes possible the rapport between the text and public opinion which, by naturalizing certain textual conventions, allows readers to overlook language, to make an easy referential transition from the words - the text - to the things - reality.

This, clearly, is another matter. We have moved from a critique merely of literary and linguistic practices and beliefs to implying a philosophical interrogation of the understanding of reality itself. Todorov suggests as much:

> It is a bitter surprise to one day perceive that our life is governed by the same laws that we discovered in (the evening paper) and that we cannot change them. The knowledge that justice obeys the laws of verisimilitude, not of truth, will save no-one from being condemned.(*Poétique*, p.99)

Todorov thus revives an opposition between verisimilitude and truth, and by implication, questions the truthfulness of realistic representations, giving more weight to the complexities of representation than the evaluative adjective realistic. This reassertion into critical practice of the

importance of language is much more radical than those with which we began this chapter. Todorov concludes his essay by asking, "is (truth) anything other than a distant and deferred verisimilitude?"(*Poétique*, p.99).

(d) Language and the limitations of realism

The quotation from Lewes with which we started this chapter serves as a useful point at which to conclude. There are, of course, substantial and important differences between the different critical approaches discussed in this section, but it is nonetheless useful to consider what they might be said to have in common. Each, simply, is arguing against the idea of self-evidence in language, and, by extension, in literature. Language in literature cannot be understood merely as effecting the transition from the words on the page to the things which they represent, even if the representations are fictional. Booth's analysis tends towards a general aesthetic theory which derives from classical poetics; Formalism seeks, as Shklovsky put it, to resurrect the word; and structuralism seeks to resurrect the sign, to focus attention upon the constructivist nature of linguistic communication.

In this sense, each of these approaches advocates a *critical* approach to the text. Ordinary apprehension of literature, in the various views of these theorists, lacks this critical perspective. Whether the critical method is to seek out the rhetoric of fiction, to focus on a new, purely artistic use of language, or to articulate the semiotic structure of literary texts, each of these theories questions the aesthetics of realism. Understood in light of these theories, words, to return to Conrad, become the foes not necessarily of reality, but certainly of realism. But this opposition between critical theory and realism takes an even more radical turn when not only the material of the text is subject to this kind of anti-intuitive inquiry but also its putative representational horizon. That is, when we are no longer content with not taking the text as it is, but begin to focus our analysis upon the other side, as it were, of the representational equation; the problem of reality itself.

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Reality, the real, and representation

Reality seems to us something worlds apart from invention.
- Sigmund Freud

Some critical theories of the text, as we have seen, seek to impede the transition from words to things, to challenge critics thoroughly to take account of the language and form of representation. This textual dimension is not, however, the only problematic aspect of realism, and in this chapter we shall explore some theoretical developments which have practised an analogous critique upon the idea of the "things" themselves. If the previous chapter was concerned with poetics, in this chapter this inquiry becomes philosophical. How is it that the representational horizon of the text is understood as reality? How is reality understood?

The apprehension of reality has, of course, been perhaps the perennial question in philosophy. The existence of "things-in-themselves", and of the access of human consciousness to those things, have been among the principle issues with which philosophers have grappled. Realism, insofar as it seems to rely upon a notion of a commonly available and comprehensible idea of reality, as was discussed in the introduction to this study, would seem, then, to have answers to these questions. Once again, however, this presupposition runs into theoretical developments which challenge the self-evidence of the reality towards which representations are intended. Therefore, a critical theory of realism must, to some extent, confront the tradition of radical philosophical doubt and skepticism which has been implicit in philosophy at least since Kant[1], and which latterly has borne pronouncedly upon literary theory.

The influence of philosophical questions upon literary theory takes many forms, but it is possible to say that the predominant effect has been a

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[1] Doubt and skepticism have, of course, been present in philosophy since its very dawn. Heraclitus, for example, is often cited as precursive to contemporary philosophy's most radical skepticism. The philosophical terrain in which the present study is moving, however, must be demarcated somewhere, and the dialectical movement of Western philosophy since Kant covers the pertinent concepts sufficiently.

repudiation of mimetic aesthetics in the service of greater critical awareness. Realistic representation has been variously characterized as naive, ideologically manipulative, or simply impossible, the standard works of realism, under the appropriate critical microscope, being revealed as inadequate in meeting their own representational requirements.

A particularly divisive critical debate which turned upon these issues was what came to be known as the modernism-realism debate. Conducted within a group of Western Marxists, this debate serves usefully to introduce some of the ideas with which this section of the present study is concerned. Fredric Jameson's commentary upon the debate offers this account:

> Modern literary theory has in fact given us what are two essentially irreconcilable accounts of realism. On the one hand there are the classical apologias for this narrative mode ... Here realism is shown to have epistemological truth, as a privileged mode of knowing the world we live in and the lives we lead in it ...
> [However,] the ideologues of modernism do not seek to refute the ... defense of the realistic mode on its own terms ... they sense its weak link to be preaesthetic, part and parcel of its basic presuppositions. Thus, the target of their attack becomes the very concept of reality itself which is implied by the realistic aesthetic ... The objection ... charges that realism, by suggesting that representation is possible ... tends to perpetuate a preconceived notion of some external reality to be imitated, and indeed, to foster a belief in the existence of some such common-sense everyday ordinary shared secular reality ... Yet ... the sheer accumulated weight of the great modern works of art ... tend to confirm the idea that there is something quite naive, in a sens quite profoundly *un*realistic ... about the notion that reality is out there simply, quite objective and independent of us, and that knowing it involves the relatively unproblematic notion of getting an adequate picture of it in our heads.[2]

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[2]Fredric Jameson, "Beyond the Cave: Demystifying the Ideology of Modernism", in his*The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971-86, Vol. II* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), pp.120-121.

Jameson's comments capture the tenor of much skeptical literary theory and philosophy. Realism, it is said, involves an array of presuppositions as to the existence of the objective world and our possible knowledge of it. Jameson's summary implies that the choice is either realism or modernism, a belief in objective reality or skepticism towards it. He goes on to argue that the uncritical acceptance of "reality" is linked to the rise of capitalism and the bourgeois commodification of everyday life. Belief in reality, then, leaps from naivety to ideology, and it is the inherent contradictions of bourgeois ideology, illuminated by modernist aesthetics as alienation and discontinuity, which signal the shortcomings of a realistic aesthetic. Jameson writes:

> Realism is no longer appropriate; indeed, in this new social world which is ours today, we can go so far as to say that the very object of realism itself - secular reality, objective reality - no longer exists either.[3]

Jameson's claim, that reality no longer exists, is a political claim. The horizon of social reality, he argues, is only conceivable under certain political conditions. By manoeuvring between the two poles of the debate, Jameson historicizes both belief in objective reality and its attendant aesthetics, a move which is made possible by the tension in Jameson's own theory between the relativism of historicism and the essentialism of his commitment to Marxian methods. The tenets of historical materialism, and Jameson's neo-Marxist historicism, thus account for the "realism" debate as he sees it.

Jameson's account, however, is only one way of looking at this issue, and certainly leaves some questions unanswered. The historicism which Jameson brings to both the philosophical/political and aesthetic dimensions of this debate is an insightful critical development, but it remains unclear what might be meant by his claim that reality no longer exists. If it once existed and no longer does, what has emerged in its stead? Or perhaps he means that it never existed, except insofar as capitalism produced a common, but erroneous, belief in it. Certainly Jameson is aware of the pitfall of making a "straw-man" of critical targets[4], but it would be another project to try to determine whether his theoretical

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[3]Jameson, "Beyond the Cave", p.122.
[4]See Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, p.18.

account of this issue falls into such pits or not. Nonetheless, Jameson's account introduces well the philosophical problematics of the critique of realistic representation, particularly those which are motivated by varieties of political philosophy, and which concern the much discussed concept of ideology.

I. REALITY AND 'THE REAL' - REIFICATION AND IDEOLOGY

(a)The Frankfurt School: a dialectic of reality

The sustained critique of idealism and positivism mounted by the critical theorists of the Frankfurt school has serious implications for the question of realistic representation in literature. Here, we shall consider some of the tenets of what came to be known as critical theory, and the ways in which these ideas have borne upon literary theory and criticism.

An important precursor to the full articulation of critical theory was the debate conducted between Georg Lukács, on the one hand, and Ernst Bloch and Bertholdt Brecht, on the other, during the 1930s. In this debate we can see the impact of a radical critical program upon literary studies, a radicalism of which Lukács was thoroughly condemnatory. Lukacs was almost entirely concerned with literary criticism at this stage, his commitment to realism evident in the essays collected as *Writer and Critic and other essays*. Lukács' 1970 preface to the English edition of this volume clearly evinces his hostility towards avant-gardism:

> My critical studies ... were directed against two fronts: against the schematic deadliness and impoverishment of socialist literature and against those movements seeking salvation in following Western avant-garde schools ... if certain exponents of the artistic avant-garde now represent themselves as inveterate anti-Stalinists, they can do so only because their work of that period has properly fallen into oblivion ...
> I sought, on the other hand, to revive the realist tradition of richness in content and form ...[5]

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[5]Georg Lukács, *Writer and Critic and other essays*, ed. and trans. Arthur D. Kahn (New York: The Universal Library, 1971), p.8. Lukács' prefaces to his republished works would make, in fact, an interesting study in themselves. His problematic relationship to Stalin and Soviet orthodoxy, complicated, of course, by Krushchev's denunciation of Stalin in 1956, prompted, it seems, a little revisionism here and there. George Lichtheim, for

Included in this collection is an essay entitled "Art and Objective Truth", which argues for objectivity as the cornerstone of Marxist-Leninist epistemology:

> The basis for any correct cognition of reality, whether of nature or society, is the recognition of the objectivity of the external world, that is, its existence independent of human consciousness. Any apprehension of the world is nothing more than a reflection in consciousness of the world that exists independent of consciousness. This basic fact ... also serves, of course, for the artistic reflection of reality.[6]

This kind of statement seems to presuppose a very straightforward epistemology, and a straightforward understanding of literary realism. We shall consider Lukács in greater detail below; these few examples of his work from this period will suffice, at this stage, to illustrate some of the ideas against which Bloch and Brecht, and later the Critical Theorists, were arguing.

Lukács, from Moscow, had maintained a strong anti-Expressionist aesthetic position, against which Bloch had written. Bloch's defence of Expressionism took issue with Lukács' very understanding of the relationship between art and reality:

> But what if Lukács's reality - a coherent, infinitely mediated reality - is not so objective after all ? What if his conception of reality has failed to liberate itself from Classical systems ? What if authentic reality is also discontinuity ? Since Lukács operates with a closed, objectivistic conception of reality ... he resolutely rejects any attempt on the part of artists to shatter any image of the world, even that of capitalism. Any art which strives to exploit the *real* fissures in surface inter-relations ...[7]

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example, sees Lukács' work during these Moscow years as including "a fair amount of what can only be described as rubbish", noting also Lukács' references to "Stalin's 'epoch-making' work on linguistics". See George Lichtheim, *Lukács* (London: Fontana, 1970), p.76.

[6]Lukács, *Writer and Critic*, p.25

[7]Ernst Bloch, "Discussing Expressionism", trans. Rodney Livingstone, in Ronald Taylor ed., *Aesthetics and Politics* (London: Verso, 1980), pp.16-27, at p.22.

In phrasing his challenge in this fashion, Bloch highlights what is philosophically at stake in this debate. While the debate can be distilled into a case of aesthetic preference - old-guard and new-guard - it also has profound philosophical implications. Against Lukacs' belief in objective reality, Bloch suggests an alternative model; one of discontinuity and "fissures." Conventional realism, if Bloch is correct, is not only regressive artistically, it is mistaken philosophically. To this challenge, Lukács responded with "Realism in the balance", another salvo against Expressionism, and, more particularly, against Bloch's enthusiastic defence. Lukács justified his position by invoking Marx:

> Bloch directs his attack at my view of totality ... The principle to be refuted, he believes, is 'the undiluted objective realism which characterized Classicism. According to Bloch, my thought is premissed throughout 'on the idea of a closed and integrated reality ...'

Lukács continues:

> In the present debate we are concerned with ... (this) question, namely, does the 'closed integration', the 'totality' of the capitalist system, of bourgeois society, with its unity of economics and ideology, really form an objective whole, independent of consciousness ?
>
> Among Marxists ... there should be no dispute on this point. Marx says: 'The relations of production of every society form a whole.'[8]

The transition from this emphasis on the totality translates readily into aesthetic realism. Lukács insists that a Marxist theory of literature must have reference to reality. He posits the notion of totality as the means of understanding reality "as it is":

> If literature is a particular form by means of which objective reality is reflected, then it becomes of crucial importance for it to grasp that reality as it truly is, and not merely to confine itself to whatever manifests itself immediately and on the surface. If a writer strives to represent reality as it truly is, i.e. if he is an authentic realist, then the question of totality plays a

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[8]Georg Lukács, "Realism in the Balance", trans. Rodney Livingstone, in *Aesthetics and Politics* , pp.30-31.

> decisive role, no matter how the writer actually conceives the problem intellectually.[9]

For Lukács, as a Marxist, the fragmented reality which Bloch suggests may in fact be authentic reality, is an impermissible view to which to hold. Bloch is suggesting that art must strive towards such a view of reality and, in doing so, must necessarily leave behind the literary techniques of social and historical realism. Being realistic within such a scheme means being Expressionistic, rather than representational. Fundamentally, we can see, the debate turns on the question of whether or not art should define itself as representational, taking social and historical reality as a model rather than a target. For Lukács, the representational aspect of literature reflects the possibility of authentic knowledge of reality, while for Bloch, and for Brecht, who similarly took up the debate, anti-representational art serves this function. It may be, as Fredric Jameson has suggested, that Lukács simply did not like modern art or literature. There are suggestions in Lukács' work of a kind of aesthetic conservatism and prudishness; he objects to naturalism[10], to the sexuality of the works of D.H. Lawrence and Henry Miller[11], to Joyce. However, the complexity of these issues cannot, I suggest, be attributed merely to differences in personal taste. This becomes more apparent in later contributions to the debate, and in the more fully developed articulation of these philosophical issues in the critical theory of the Frankfurt school.

The impact of critical theory on literary concerns is well expressed in Adorno's work on literature. Adorno, who, along with Horkheimer, can be considered the chief theoretician of the Frankfurt school, similarly took issue with realism:

> Nowadays, anyone who continued to dwell on concrete reality ... and wants to derive his impact from the fullness and plasticity of a material reality contemplated and humbly accepted ... would be guilty of a lie: the lie of delivering himself over to the world

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[9]Lukács, "Realism in the Balance", p.33.
[10]See Lukács, "Narrate or Describe?", in *Writer and Critic*.
[11]See Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, trans. John and Necke Mander (Berlin, 1955; London: Merlin Press, 1963), p.74.

> with a love that presupposes that the world is meaningful ...[12]

Adorno goes on to consider the movement away from realism in the novel, the genre with which realism was most frequently associated. In these references, we see how Adorno's philosophical anti-empiricism generates a movement towards literary avant-gardism. Realism, Adorno argues, is the aesthetic counterpart of what we might call a faith in the self-evidence of things. The dialectic having undermined that self-evidence, the realistic theory of literature must, accordingly, give way.

In this context, Adorno wrote against Lukács, who after WWII had continued his invective against modern art, particularly now modernism. Adorno's criticism is telling. He points out many shortcomings in Lukács critical work, what we might call his "shotgun" approach, for example:

> Lukács groups completely disparate figures under the concepts of decadence and avantgardism (for him they are the same thing) - not only Proust, Kafka, Joyce, and Beckett but also Benn, Jünger, and perhaps Heidegger; and as theoreticians, Benjamin and myself.[13]

But, the strength of Adorno's criticism of Lukács' shortcomings aside, the fundamental point of difference is the orientation of the relationship between art and reality. Adorno sets art *against* reality, rather than *with* reality, as in the relationship proposed by Lukács. He writes:

> ... not by gazing at mere immediacy, does art become knowledge ... Only in a crystallization of its own formal law and not in a passive acceptance of objects does art converge with what is real. In art knowledge is mediated through and through. In art even what Lukács considers to be solipsism and a regression to the illusionary immediacy of the subject does not signify a denial of the object, as it does in bad epistemologies, but rather aims dialectically at reconciliation with the object ... It (art) represents negative knowledge of reality ... A theory of art that

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[12]Theodor W. Adorno, "The Position of the Narrator in the Contemporary Novel"(1954), in Theodor W. Adorno, *Notes to Literature, Volume I*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p.30.

[13]Adorno, "Extorted Reconciliation: On Georg Lukács *Realism in Our Time*"(1958), in *Notes to Literature, Volume I*, p.221.

> refuses to acknowledge this is philistine and ideological at the same time.[14]

Adorno's formulation of the negative cognitive relationship between art and reality must be understood within the context of the Frankfurt school's sustained critique of reason; the project to reveal the myth, we might say, of enlightenment.

Max Horkheimer - installed as director of the Frankfurt school in January 1931[15] - was instrumental in inaugurating one sense of the word "critical" which persists in contemporary literary and philosophical studies. He writes:

> The critical theory of society ... has for its object men as producers of their own way of life in its totality. The real situations which are the starting point of science are not regarded simply as data to be verified ...[16]

The theorists of the Frankfurt School enlisted literature into Critical Theory, taking the position that literature must not simply verify reality, but embody a critique of it. Ironically, perhaps, the Frankfurt school actually owed much of this critical methodology to Lukács.[17] In *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács had laid the groundwork for critical analysis of social structures based upon what he called the phenomenon of reification. Reification, which confers, Lukács says, an illusory objectivity upon social phenomena, is the immediate target of his Hegelian-Marxist critique:

> It (reification) can be overcome only by *constant and constantly renewed efforts to disrupt the reified structure of existence by concretely relating to the concretely manifested contradictions of the total*

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[14]Adorno, "Extorted Reconciliation", pp.224-225.

[15]I have obtained this, and most other, historical information on the Frankfurt school from the following sources:Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imgination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research 1923-50* (London: Heinemann, 1973); Andrew Arato & Eike Gebhardt eds, *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader* (New York: Continuum, 1982); Richard Kearney ed., *Routledge History of Philosophy, Volume VIII: Twentieth-Century Continental Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1994).

[16]Max Horkheimer, Postscript to "Traditional and Critical Theory", in Paul Connerton ed., *Critical Sociology: Selected Readings* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), p.222.

[17]Lukács' influence on early critical theory is well-documented; see Arato & Gebhardt, *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, pp.193-207; Andrew Feenberg, *Lukács, Marx, and the Sources of Critical Theory* (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1981).

> *development, by becoming conscious of the immanent meanings of these contradictions ...*

He continues:

> Only when the consciousness of the proletariat is able to point out the road along which the dialectics of history is objectively impelled ... will the proletariat become the identical subject-object of history whose praxis will change reality.[18]

Once again, we will defer more detailed discussion of Lukács' work; it is necessary, however, to understand the general shape of Lukács' critique. Reificiation - and its cognate concept of ideology - imposes itself upon human cognition. Jameson, concluding the volume *Aesthetics and Politics*, summarizes the substance of Lukács' critique:

> reification is a process which affects our cognitive relationship with the social totality ... The reification of late capitalism ... renders society opaque: it is the lived source of the mystifications on which ideology is based ...[19]

While Lukács' critical theory, such as it is, proposed various solutions or goals towards which the critique of society might progress - the humanism of his Hegelian-Marxism, the Party during his strict orthodoxy - the adoption and adaptation of his method of social and cultural critique by the Frankfurt school involved an ever-increasing radical skepticism, particularly in the aesthetic and cultural theories of Adorno. Unlike Lukács, Adorno was prepared to believe that the inherent contradictions of the reified structure of society were irresolvable, and to abandon the possibility of social re-integration. For Adorno, earlier reified and reifying frameworks, like religion, were being replaced by culture. The collaborative *Dialectic of Enlightenment* makes this comparison:

> The sociological theory that the loss of the support of objectively established religion, the dissolution of the last remnants of precapitalism, together with technological and social differentiation or

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[18]Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Berlin, 1923; London: The Merlin Press, 1971), p.197.
[19]*Aesthetics and Politics*, p.212.

> specialization, have led to cultural chaos is disproved every day; for culture now impresses the same stamp upon everything. Film, radio and magazines make up a system which is uniform as a whole and in every part.[20]

In accordance with this conviction, Adorno argues for the possibility of art not merely to reflect critical knowledge of the reified world but actually to *be* critical knowledge. "New music", James Joyce, a relentless need, according to Jameson, "for modern art and thought to be difficult";[21] these, among other things, constitute, for Adorno, the possibilities of critical knowledge. The Marxian critique of actual political conditions, of commodity fetishism, of ideology, develops into a critique of reason and rationalism, of aesthetics, of culture, of any sort of cultural, social, or philosophical unity.

Fredric Jameson notes Adorno's resolute radicalism. He writes:

> The essential argument of *Negative Dialektik* and Adorno's ultimate philosophical position, seems to me to be an articulation on the theoretical level of that methodology which we have seen at work in a concrete, practical way in the earlier aesthetic essays and critical writings ... the practice of negative dialectics involves a constant movement away from the official content of an idea - as, for example, the "real" nature of freedom or of society as things in themselves - and toward the various contradictory forms which such ideas have taken, whose conceptual limits and inadequacies stand as immediate figures or symptoms of the limits of the concrete social situation itself.[22]

Adorno's radical skepticism anticipates, in some ways, the radical skepticism which was later to develop in the structuralist and post-structuralist movements. Jameson's overview of the realism-modernism debate makes this connection:

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[20]Theodor W. Adorno & Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (London: Verso, 1979), p.120.
[21]Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971) p.3.
[22]Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, p.55.

> post-structuralism has added yet a different kind of parameter to the Realism/Modernism controversy, one which - like the question of narrative or the problems of historicity - was implicit in the original exchange but scarcely articulated or thematized as such. The assimilation of realism as a value to the old philosophical concept of mimesis by such writers as Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard or Deleuze, has reformulated the Realism/Modernism debate in terms of a Platonic attack on the ideological effects of representation.[23]

The logic of this development from the realism/modernism debate to post-structuralism is instructive. Although realism is quite different to the classical idea of mimesis, conflating the two makes possible a rejection of realism on the same grounds as Plato's rejection of mimesis. Plato dismissed mimesis because it claimed truthfully to represent objects of which the truth, according to Plato's theory of Forms, was necessarily located outside and beyond its appearance. If the truth-claim attributed to mimesis is transferred to realism, then realism seems to be claiming a truth where it only represents an appearance of the truth. This appearance, moreover, is not limited by a lack of access to the truth of things, but by the ideological subsitution of appearance for essence.

This is a complicated juxtaposition because while classical ideas of mimesis can be considered distant forebears of realism, there are important differences, particularly with regard to the idea of "truth," which are elided by too simple an identification between them. If realism is described as co-extensive with classical mimesis then its implicit cognitive claim, under attack from this radical critique of cognition itself, seems untenable. The movement from political critique to metaphysical critique, as represented particularly by Adorno, characterizes representational aesthetics as uncritical. Critical theory becomes possible only when rational structures give way to relentless abstraction, a negation of the real.

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[23] *Aesthetics and Politics*, p.199.

(b)Louis Althusser: a science of theory

The other predominant current of Western Marxism - and one which claims to depart from the Hegelianism of both Lukács and the Frankfurt School - which bears upon the present inquiry was inaugurated by Althusser's "intervention," via which, according to Vincent Descombes, Althusser re-negotiated Marxism so as to provide it with a scientific, anti-humanist grounding, thereby extricating it from the vestiges of theoretical humanism without surrendering it to vulgar determinism.[24] As Descombes notes, and Althusser himself is very explicit about, his intervention was occasioned by specific developments in the (empirical) history of world communism - Sino-Soviet antagonism, and the denunciation of Stalin.[25] Here, as with the Frankfurt School, we are concerned with the general theoretical shape of Althusserian Marxism.

We start with the aspect of Althusser's thought which is, perhaps, most well-known: anti-humanism. Althusser's anti-humanism is renowned, and often the basis of criticism, on the grounds that he rejects as "ideological" any values which are implicit in the nebulous concept of humanism.[26] It seems oxymoronic to speak of anti-humanist Marxism, Marxism deriving, of course, from an apprehension of social injustice. It is helpful, then, to attend to this concept, to make some sense of what anti-humanism means in this context.

The basis of Althusser's anti-humanism is his claim that there is a discontinuity between the young Marx of the *Theses on Feuerbach* and the mature Marx of *Capital*. The Hegelian Marxism represented by Lukács, which posits humanity as both the subject and object of Marxism is rejected, Althusser says, by Marx himself:

> In 1845, Marx broke radically with every theory that based history and politics on an essence of man. This

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[24]See Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, p.18. Perry Anderson also stresses the irruptive quality of Althusser's work , arguing that it represented the first major theoretical system born within French communism; see Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London: New Left Books, 1976), p.38.

[25]For a full account of these events in the context of Althusser's works, see Gregory Elliott, *Althusser: The Detour of Theory* (London: Verso, 1987), pp.16 ff.

[26]See, for example, Richard Freadman and Seamus Miller, *Re-thinking Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

> unique rupture contained three indissociable elements.
>
> (1) The formation of a theory of history and politics based on radically new concepts: the concepts of social formation, productive forces, relations of production, superstructure, ideologies, determination in the last instance by the economy, specific determination of the other levels etc.
>
> (2) A radical critique of the *theoretical* pretensions of every philosophical humanism.
>
> (3) The definition of humanism as an *ideology*.
>
> ...
>
> This rupture with every *philosophical* anthropology or humanism is no secondary detail; it is Marx's scientific discovery.[27]

Althusserian anti-humanism is not, however, an advocacy of the monstrous, a negative value system which does not concern itself with human welfare. Rather, it must be understood in the context of scientific Marxism, and in particular with Althusser's attempts to locate the perspective of critical theory *outside* human experience. Fredric Jameson argues this:

> The most scandalous aspect of Structuralism as a movement - its militant anti-humanism, as found in both Marxists (Althusser) and in anti-Marxists (Foucault) alike - must be understood conceptually as a refusal of the older categories of human nature and of the notion that man (or human consciousness) is an intelligible entity or field of study in himself.[28]

And Jameson goes on to say that this "essential theme of Structuralism, (is) not so much an intrinsic discovery in its own right, but rather ... a kind of motivation for some more basic tendency in structural research, namely the emphasis on decoding and decipherment."[29]

Althusser's emphasis on this kind of scientific Marxism derives from his conviction that human experience is inevitably corrupted by ideology. The history of the term ideology is so fraught with vagaries that it seems today to be empty of any clear meaning. Nonetheless, its importance within

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[27]Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (Paris, 1965; London: Verso, 1990), p.227.
[28]Jameson, *The Prison-House*, p.139.
[29]Jameson,*The Prison-House*, p.141.

Althusser's schema necessitates attention. While for Lukács, ideology and its entanglement in the concept of reification was equated with "false consciousness," the antidote to which was the true consciousness of the proletariat as the identical subject-object of history, the ideology to which Althusser refers is less easily eluded. The well-known "lived relations" definition is clearly expressed in *For Marx*:

> we can say that ideology, as a system of representations, is distinguished from science in that in it the practico-social function is more important than the theoretical function (function as knowledge). What is the nature of this social function? To understand it we must refer to the Marxist theory of history. The 'subjects' of history are given human societies. They present themselves as totalities whose unity is constituted by a certain specific type of *complexity*, which introduces instances, that, following Engels, we can, very schematically, reduce to three: the economy, politics and ideology. So in every society we can posit, in forms which are sometimes very paradoxical, the existence of an economic activity as the base, a political organization and 'ideological' forms (religion, ethics, philosophy, etc). *So ideology is as such an organic part of every social totality* ... So ideology is not an aberration or a contingent excrescence of History: it is a structure essential to the historical life of societies.[30]

This ineluctability of ideology is supplemented by the relationship between ideology and the unconscious, used here in a non-Freudian sense:

> In truth, ideology has very little to do with consciousness ... It is profoundly *unconscious* ... Ideology is indeed a system of representations, but in the majority of cases these representation have nothing to do with 'consciousness' ... it is above all as *structures* that they impose on the vast majority of men, not via their 'consciousness'. They are perceived - accepted - suffered cultural objects and they act functionally on men via a process that escapes them. Men 'live' their ideologies as the Cartesian 'saw' - or did not see - if he was not looking at it - the moon two hundred paces away: *not at all as a form of consciousness, but as an object of their 'world'* - as

[30]Althusser, *For Marx*, pp.231-232.

> their *'world'* itself ... men *live* their actions ... in ideology, *by and through ideology*; in short ... the 'lived' relation between men and the world ... passes through ideology, or better, *is ideology itself*.[31]

Given that, according to Althusser, life is thoroughly ideological - he goes so far as to say that ideology is "indispensable" and the well-known essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses"[32] considers some of its social manifestations - it cannot provide access to what he calls knowledge. Althusser sets up a distinction between, on the one hand, experience and ideology, and, on the other, theory and knowledge. Theory is Althusser's guiding concept;[33] it incorporates the idea of Marxism, of philosophy itself, as scientific praxes which enable true, non-ideological knowledge. In this, Althusser's project is comparable with that of the Frankfurt School, his antipathy towards their "ideology of reification" notwithstanding. Both critical tendencies argue for a (critical) theory which sets itself against the social and historical world, and which can be the only claimant of cognitive authority.

It must be noted, however, that Althusser's theory, so dependent on a rigid distinction between experience and knowledge, has trouble maintaining this very distinction. Having argued (conceded?) that even communist societies cannot do without ideology, Althusser defines the ideology of a classless society as being measured by the (experienced) "profit of all men." This return to experience is more thoroughly charted, and with something of an air of finality, by Vincent Descombes:

> Returning ... to experience and the 'lived-through', Althusser abandons the attempt to endow Marxism with an epistemological foundation and reverts to the phenomenological foundation which previously had been thought satisfactory enough. In 1965, Althusser had denounced the confusion of the 'real object' ... with the 'object of knowledge' ... The rehabilitation of

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[31] Althusser, *For Marx*, p.233.

[32] See Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and other essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971).

[33] Althusser was the general editor of the publishing *série* in which most of his major works, as well as those of Macherey and Balibar, among others, appeared. The title of this series was *Théorie*.

> the identity between the two after 1970 brings the Althusserian undertaking to an official close.[34]

But these complexities - even shortcomings - of Althusserian theory, and the "official" close of the undertaking, do not signal the end of the Althusserian matter. The influence of structuralist Marxism upon contemporary literary theory has been profound, and, as I have mentioned, has motivated much of the 'anti-theory' reaction. Accordingly, I shall overlook this "close" and consider now the impact of Althusser's distinction between knowledge and ideology upon questions of literary representation - particularly as it is manifested in Althusser's own literary theory, and in the work of his student Pierre Macherey.

Althusser himself considers the relationships between theory/knowledge, ideology, and art/literature, in the following terms:

> The problem of the relations between art and ideology is a very complicated and difficult one. However, I can tell you in what directions our investigations tend. *I do not rank real art among the ideologies.*[35]

Althusser refers to Pierre Macherey's literary theory - to which we shall shortly turn - and goes on to say that art, which is not ideology, is similarly not knowledge. Rather, art, according to Althusser, has a "relationship" with each. He writes,

> the peculiarity of art is to 'make us see' (*nous donner à voir*), 'make us perceive', 'make us feel' something which *alludes* to reality ... What art makes us *see*, and therefore gives to us in the form of *'seeing'*, *'perceiving'* and *'feeling'* (which is not the form of *knowing*), is the *ideology* from which it is born, in which it bathes, from which it detaches itself as art, and to which it *alludes*.[36]

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[34]Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, p.135. Descombes is not referring to the same material as I; the point, I believe, is nonetheless valid. It is also important to note that Descombes' analysis of Althusser gives particular resonance to his use of the terms phenomenological and epistemological.

[35]Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, p.221.

[36]Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, p.222. Althusser's words here - about making one see, and so forth - are strikingly similar to those of Joseph Conrad in his preface to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*. Whether this is intentional or not is, perhaps, not determinable, but it provides an interesting point of analysis insofar as Althusser's intention is critically to

Althusser suggests, then, that art is a kind of intermediary between knowledge and ideology. Real art, that is; whatever he may mean by that. It is possible to juxtapose this "real art" with the idea of art *as* critical knowledge proposed by Adorno, which, as we have seen, involves a commitment to aesthetic discontinuity. Althusser, however, cites Macherey as an authority on this point, and Macherey's essay to which Althusser refers is about Tolstoy (via Lenin), who, according to Jameson's analysis of Adorno, is something of a literary Beethoven, as opposed to Schönberg and Joyce, who represent Adorno's critical art.[37]

As Althusser says, Pierre Macherey contributed the most complete synthesis of literary theory and structuralist Marxism. Applying Althusser's principles of production, structural causality, and overdetermination, Macherey develops a productionist aesthetic:

> the work does not proceed with this ingenuous freedom, with this independent movement which will be the token of pure invention, but is rather sustained by an organized diversity which gives it both form and content.
> Therefore, the improvised nature which the work presents is nothing but an effect, a *product* ... The work is not made at random, according to the law of a disinterested freedom, it is made because at each moment and at each of its levels it is precisely determined.[38]

This productionist aesthetic reasserts Althusser's distinction between ideology and knowledge and places literature in between the two. Literary theory, according to Macherey, enables the critic to appreciate this complex double-edged relationship which places literature thus. In order to argue this, Macherey develops a specific concept which he calls 'fiction':

> Fiction, which we must not confuse with illusion, is the substitute, if not the equivalent, of knowledge

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undermine these "effects" by interpolating his theory of ideology, whereas Conrad's seems to be to achieve them.

[37]Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, p.41. Beethoven in Adorno's schema is not characterized as entirely "regressive" and neither, by extension, is Tolstoy; but they do not achieve the critical position that Adorno attributes to Schönberg.

[38]Pierre Macherey, *Pour une théorie de la production littéraire* (Paris: François Maspero, 1966), p.51, trans. mine.

> (*connaissance*). A theory of literary production must teach us what the book 'knows', and how it 'knows' it.
>
> Thus, for the flight of illusion which gives an indeterminate account, the book substitutes the clear contours - which are not, however, simple - of a fiction. Fiction is a determined illusion: the essence of the literary text is in the establishment of one such determination.[39]

Fiction is thus a kind of conduit between theory/knowledge and ideology/illusion. Literary theory, which attends to fiction, is the knowledge and communication of the fiction of the literary text. Macherey's book turns on this intermediary quality of literary theory, its position between illusion and knowledge, the implicit and the explicit, *envers/endroit*, what the text says and what it does not. He pursues the articulation of this theory through the establishment of theoretical principles, through analysis of literary criticism, particularly Lenin's work on Tolstoy, and through working on several diverse literary texts.

This articulation of a literary theory based on the Althusserian principles seems to militate against realistic theories which are unable to move, Macherey argues, beyond the idea of semblance, which inhibits the transition from illusion/ideology to fiction/literary theory, and certainly rules out the achievement of knowledge/theory. Macherey says as much, defining literary discourse as parody, rather than representation. There would seem, then, in structuralist Marxist literary theory, to be an emphasis on dissonance. Fredric Jameson, rethinking interpretation in the light of Marxian aesthetics, makes this point:

> In the case of Althusserian literary criticism proper, then, the appropriate object of study emerges only when the appearance of formal unification is unmasked as a failure or an ideological mirage. The authentic function of the cultural text is then staged as an *interference* ... for Althusser and Pierre Macherey the privileged form of this disunity or dissonance is the objectification of the ideological by the work of aesthetic production. The aim of a properly structural interpretation or exegesis thus becomes the explosion of the seemingly unified text into a host of clashing and contradictory elements.[40]

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[39]Macherey, *Théorie*, p.80.
[40]Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, p.56.

Althusserian theory, then, sets itself against the unity of form and content and the representational relationship between the text and reality which are characteristic of realism. Or, at least, so it seems. Jameson, however, goes on to point out that, unlike "canonical post-structuralism", the Marxian analysis must be reunified, because Marxist theory, with the possible exception of the negative dialectics of the Frankfurt School, relies upon the possibility of the ultimate reconciliation of political alienation. Elsewhere in the same book, he says that Althusser does not "draw the fashionable conclusion that because history is a text, the 'referent' does not exist."[41] Macherey himself shows how literary theory, as he understands it, may be radically critical, but is not radically skeptical:

> Obviously this does not mean that criticism serves to undo literature, to destroy illusion: the study of literary works supposes neither a blind faith nor an obligatory mistrust: faith and mistrust would be the two extreme forms of the same rank prejudice.[42]

The impact of scientific Marxism upon literary theory, at this stage of its development, is complicated. While this kind of theory insists upon a radical critique which would seem to encompass mimetic literature, it is also attended by an appreciation of the unavoidability, even the necessity, of literary mimesis. In due course, I shall show how this critical position can itself be subject to critique which will show how it may be possible to reconcile literary mimesis with critical literary theory.

Before moving to that stage of the present study, however, it is necessary to consider another philosophical development which has influenced literary theory and the problem of mimesis. The twentieth-century emphasis on the *critical*, which we have considered in relation to language and literature, and the social and historical world and literature, has also been applied to questions of metaphysics. We turn now to these questions as they inform Jacques Derrida's radical phenomenology and its cognate critical method, deconstruction.

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[41]Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, p.35.
[42]Macherey, *Théorie*, p.91.

II. REPRESENTATION AND 'PRESENCE' - DECONSTRUCTION

It is with some caution that we call Derrida's work "phenomenological." Richard Kearney points out that Derrida himself acknowledges his phenomenological heritage, more Heideggerian than Husserlian, especially insofar as the former set himself against classical metaphysics.[43] Additionally, Derrida's early major works were essentially reworkings of phenomenological texts, particularly *Speech and Phenomena*. It is beyond the scope of this study thoroughly to consider Derrida and his phenomenological heritage. These complexities have, of course, been exhaustively discussed,[44] and it is not my intention here to enter into similar kinds of discussions nor to consider the various ways in which Derridean thought has been interpreted and mobilized. Rather, I shall here look at a small selection of Derrida's work and consider how some of the tenets of Derrida's method, as they are manifested in these texts, bear upon the present enquiry into realistic representation.

In the landmark essay "Structure, sign and play ...", perhaps the founding document of post-structuralism[45], Derrida makes clear the *critical* bias of his enterprise. He takes issue with metaphysics, with history, with structuralism, trying to show how each is possessed of a will towards some sort of origin, or, more particularly, towards a *centre*. By setting himself against - by initiating his *critique* of - ideas or concepts of the centre, Derrida illustrates the "rupture" in the history of the concept of structure with which he begins his essay. The nature and function of the centre, Derrida says, is that

> it is the point where the substitution of contents, of elements, of terms, is no longer possible. At the

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[43]Richard Kearney, *Modern Movements in European Philosophy: 2nd edition* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), p.114.

[44]I am particularly indebted to the following texts for material on and analyses of Derrida: Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, particularly Chapter 5, "Difference"; Descombes, *Grammaire d'objets en tous genres*; Kearney, *Modern Movements in European Philosophy*; Kearney ed., *Twentieth-Century Continental Philosophy*; Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction* (London: Routledge, 1984).

[45]It is Derrida's emphasis in this essay on what he calls the "structurality of structure" which prompts this suggestion. Where structuralism replaces the idea of self-evidence with a notion of structural-evidence, Derrida seeks to question the means whereby this is achieved through his critique of the "centre." It is noteworthy, however, that while structuralism was a term which accompanied the development of the theories now characterized as structuralist, in the context of French philosophy and theory, post-structuralism is not a widely used term.

> centre, the permutation or the transformation of elements ... is forbidden. At least, it has always been *forbidden* (and I use this word by design). It has always been thought, then, that the centre, which is unique by definition, rules the structure, escapes structurality.[46]

Derrida is concerned to challenge this prohibition against questioning the centre. In order to do so, he argues that the very idea of the centre is contradictory. Appeals to the centre and its cognate idea of *présence*[47] have always, Derrida argues, informed, and so limited, Western discourses. By arguing that the centre is not a fixed place but a function, Derrida seeks to *decentre* discourse, to make the centre also discourse, and to emphasize what he calls "the play of signification"(*ED*, p.411).

But, typically, this process is problematic, and much of Derrida's argument turns on this very point. Reluctantly citing Nietzsche, Freud, and, especially, Heidegger, as forebears of the decentring process, Derrida illustrates the problem in the following terms:

> all these destructive discourses and all their analogues are caught in a kind of circle. This circle is unique and it describes the form of a relationship between the history of metaphysics and the destruction of the history of metaphysics: *there is no way* to unsettle metaphysics without the use of metaphysical concepts; we have no language ... which would be a stranger to this history; we cannot express any destructive proposition which has not already had to slide into the form, into the logic and into the implicit postulations of the very thing which it would contest.(*ED*, p.412)

This, of course, is the deconstructionist paradox: how can one undermine language except in language? A problem arises insofar as a critique of appeals to the centre seems necessarily to have claimed an infallible position from which to undertake that critique. But this position, within a deconstructionist scheme, must also be criticized. This problem may be

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[46]Jacque Derrida, *L'écriture et la différence* (Paris: Seuil, 1967), p.410, trans. mine.

[47]"Presence" may be understood as "centre" substantiated - as Derrida says, God, or transcendentality, or essence, as centre; see p.411. Hereafter, this volume will be referred to as *ED*, and references will be included in the text.

understood as a problem of self-critique. From what perspective, and to what end, is self-critique to be undertaken?

Derrida explores this problem with reference to the ethnological work of Levi-Strauss. He articulates several key concepts along the way: the notion of *bricolage*, of play, and of supplementarity. All of these ideas are figures of the way in which Derrida seeks to set the strategies of deconstruction to work in the human sciences. Understanding the human sciences in terms of these ideas, Derrida argues, confronts the tendency towards a centre, towards presence, and this confrontation represents the possibility of a perpetual, but unsuccesful, testing of the limits imposed upon human sciences by their traditional metaphysical base.

The figure of play is particularly important to this project. The lack of exhaustiveness to which Levi-Strauss refers is predicated on an empirical relationship between the inquirer and the field of inquiry. If a total picture of the field - in Levi-Strauss' case South American mythology - is not achieved, it is a shortcoming on the part of inquirer, a lack of omniscience. Levi-Strauss defends himself by suggesting that such a shortcoming is not fatal to inquiry, that the non-total view is, in many cases, sufficient. But Derrida's critique modifies this relationship between the inquirer and the field of inquiry. Instead of seeing the failure to achieve totalization as deriving from the inevitable shortcomings of the inquirer, or the inquiry, Derrida characterizes non-totalization as an ineluctable property of the field of inquiry itself. This redefinition of the field of inquiry is where Derrida interpolates his concept of play:

> this field is, in effect, one of *play*, that is to say, of infinite substitutions within a finished ensemble. This field only permits these substitutions because it is finite, that is, because instead of being an inexhaustible field, as in the classic hypothesis, instead of being too big, it lacks something, to know a centre which arrests and grounds the play of substitutions.(*ED*, p.423)

Play, then, is the figure that Derrida uses to try to deconstruct existing approaches in the human sciences. The properties of play allow him to locate infinite substitutions within a finite field, a move which both validates and relativizes every effort at inquiry. The importance of play is

reinforced by his efforts to imbue the concept of play with a kind of philosophical primacy:

> Play is the disruption of presence. The presence of an element is always a signifying and substitutive reference inscribed within a system of differences and the movement of a chain. Play is always the play of absence and presence, but if we would think play radically, we must think it prior to the alternatives of presence and absence; we must think of being as presence or as absence from the possibility of play, and not the other way around.(*ED*, p.426)

Articulating these deconstructionist concepts - play, bricolage, absence - Derrida is trying fundamentally to revise the human sciences, to change them from ambitious inquiry which contemplates its success to an endless process of valid but fruitless engagements. He is keenly aware of the difficulties of realizing such an ambition. Even Levi-Strauss, catalyst for much of his argument in this essay, according to Derrida, evinces a "kind of ethic of presence, a nostalgia for the origin"(*ED*, p.427). Turning from Levi-Strauss to Nietszche, Derrida writes of:

> the joyous affirmation of the play of the world and of the innocence of becoming, the affirmation of the world of signs without error, without truth, without origin ... (*ED*, p.427)

But he closes the essay with a tacit acknowledgement that Being-as-absence is not, perhaps, an option; a reflection on our, and his, aversion to this unnamable formlessness.

Derrida's willingness to close his discussion with an image of "terrifying monstrosity" is itself evidence of the way in which, according to Richard Kearney, "Derrida rigorously undermines traditional notions of thinking and endeavours to overcome the division between philosophical and aesthetic discourse."[48] His essay, like the concepts it discusses, is a kind of Gothic tale, haunted by absence, which it cannot quite explain nor escape.[49]

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[48]Kearney, *Modern Movements*, p.112.

[49]Derrida's later work seems to me to be increasingly aesthetic. *The Post-Card* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), for example, begins as a vaguely erotic correspondence. *Spectres de Marx: L'état de la dette, le travail du deuil at la nouvelle Internationale* (Paris: Galilée, 1993), begins as a kind of drama, *Hamlet* actually, as it begins to rethink the "phantoms" of Marxism.

This aspect of Derrida's work motivates the vast divergencies of interpretation of his philosophy. While "Structure, sign and play in the discourse of the human sciences" seems to endorse a kind of Nietzschean view of the lack of centre, it would be erroneous to suggest that this is an uncontested view of Derrida's position.[50]

Nestled amongst the complexities of his task and of his expression, not to mention the industry which has committed himself to the exploration of his work, however, he exhibits, I suggest, one consistent trait: a relentlessly critical disposition. Countless philosophical propositions, not to mention philosophers, are subjected - in Derrida's vast *œuvre* - to deconstructionist analysis. Similarly, forms and patterns of human behaviour, the material of the human sciences, are subjected to Derrida's radical critique. Derrida's method, however, is not merely to confront his material. Rather, the strategy of deconstruction, according to Descombes, is a kind of *double game*:

> Derrida opts to play a *double game* (in the sense that a 'double agent' serves two sides), feigning obedience to the tyrannical system of rules while simultaneously laying traps for it in the form of problems which it is at a loss to settle.[51]

Descombes continues on this point:

> The *double game* is thus not only of the deconstructor's doing: in order for it to be played, the language of philosophy must itself already be full of duplicity (in both senses of the word - state of doubleness, or hypocrisy and lying). Indeed, ever since his first published text, the introduction to Husserl's *Origin of Geometry*, Derrida has done nothing but denounce the pretensions of philosophical language to univocity. He has not ceased to wage a campaign ... in favour of equivocity.[52]

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[50]It would, of course, be impossible here fully to overview the different ways and different disciplines in which Derrida has been interpreted, misinterpreted, employed, and so on. Two helpful references, however, have been Penelope Deutscher, "Operatives *différance*", forthcoming in *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, in which she considers some of the various labels which have been attached to Derrida; and Irene E. Harvey, *Derrida and the Economy of Différance* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1986), p.23, where she provides an a-z of what, in her view, Derrida is *not*.

[51]Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, p.139.

[52]Descombes,*Modern French Philosophy*, p.140.

Derrida's campaign in favour of equivocity can be seen in *Speech and Phenomena*, his first major work, which seeks to deconstruct Husserl's phenomenological critique of metaphysics. According to Derrida, Husserl's critique of metaphysics is only of metaphysics "in the customary sense", when, according to Derrida:

> Husserl, while ceaselessly criticizing metaphysical speculation, in fact had his eye only on the perversion or degeneracy of what he continued to believe in and wished to restore as authentic metaphysics ...[53]

The problem with Husserl's critique of metaphysics, according to Derrida, is that it is still concerned to identify an element of immediacy, of univocity, in human thought. Husserl's distinction between indication, which is conventional, mediated language, and expression betrays this in Husserl:

> All speech, or rather everything in speech which does not restore the immediate presence of the signified content, is in-expressive. Pure expression will be the pure active intention ... of an act of meaning ... that animates a speech whose content ... is present(*SP*, p.40)

We can see parallels between Derrida's critique of metaphysics and Roland Barthes' analysis of the reality effect; both suggest that a belief in an immediacy between a sign and its content must be undermined. Derrida says as much when he argues that Husserl's philosophy of presence, insofar as it relies upon immediacy,

> eliminates signs by making them derivative; it annuls reproduction and representation by making signs a modification of a simple presence. But because it is just such a philosophy ... which has so constituted and established the very concepts of signs, the sign is from its origin and to the core of its sense marked by this will to derivation or effacement. Thus, to restore the original and nonderivative character of signs, in opposition to classical metaphysics, is, by an apparent paradox, at the same time to eliminate a concept of

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[53]Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena And Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs* , trans. David B. Allison (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p.5. Future references will be abbreviated *SP* and included in the text.

> signs whose whole history and meaning belong to the adventure of the metaphysics of presence.(*SP*, p.51)

For Derrida, then, the resurrection of the sign is not merely an aesthetic manoeuvre, but a metaphysical rupture, it requires the kind of revision which he advocated in "Structure, sign and play". Without such a revision philosophical critique is, Derrida suggests, limited to characterizing being as a form of presence, and, he says, the persistence of the privilege, or univocity, of presence, has profound implications for all forms of representation:

> Representation can be understood in the general sense ... but also in the sense of re-presentation, as repetition or reproduction of presentation.(*SP*, p.49)

Insofar as representation is incorporated into a philosophy of presence, it would seem to be antithetical to deconstruction, which is concerned, as we have seen, not simply to deny presence, but to reassert the interrelation between presence and absence. Derrida's deconstructive figures supplement the originary function of presence, interrupting its immediacy and denying its identity.

If deconstruction revises philosophy so as to question the very idea of representation, then the specific form of representation with which we are concerned in this study would seem also to warrant deconstructive critique. Indeed, Derrida, when he does turn to the question of artistic representation, seems to be suggesting just such a revision. Derrida revives the long-standing association of critical thought with aesthetic avant-gardism, and turns to the theatre of cruelty as a kind of aesthetic embodiment of deconstruction. The theatre of cruelty is not, he says, a representation, which sets it apart from classical theatre. Persisting with this anti-representational theme, he goes on to question artistic representation itself:

> Is not the most naive form of representation *mimesis* ? Like Nietzsche - and the affinities do not end there - Artaud wants then to finish with the *imitative* concept of art, with the Aristotelian aesthetics in which the Western metaphysics of art are known. *Art is not the imitation of life* ... (*ED*, p.344)

And, further on in the same essay, he evokes a familiar topos, the death of God. The Dostoevskian overtones of this topos are highly suggestive.[54] Without an idea of God, which, as we have seen, performs the function of a centre, all sorts of revisions are necessary; epistemological, ontological, and ethical. This eviction of God makes, in the case of the theatre of cruelty, art into such a revision:

> The theatre of cruelty chases God from the stage. It does not stage a new atheistic discourse, it does not give rise to the speech of atheism, it does not deliver the theatre space to a philosophical logic proclaiming once more ... the death of God. It is the cruel theatrical practice which, in its act and structure, inhabits, or, rather, *produces*, a non-theological space.
> The stage is theological in as much as it is dominated by speech, by a will to speech, by the picture of a first Word ... (*ED*, p.345)

With the theatre of cruelty, art effects the kind of critique which, in Derrida's view, eluded Husserl. It is not a *belief* in the absence of God, it is a non-theology which precedes and precludes models and ideas of deities. Derrida is discussing theatre, the Aristotelian aesthetics to which he refers are dramatic, and there is certainly a world of difference between Aristotelian *mimesis* and the realistic novel. The specific reference to drama, and to Artaud, prohibit a simple transposition of Derrida's argument here to the debate over "realism." But it is possible inferentially to consider some implications for the present study of his aesthetics of non-immediacy and non-representation. What Derrida attributes to classical mimetic drama is a kind of transparency, which allows a passage through the text to the "reality" towards which the text is intended. This attribution has much in common with what I have called the "ends" of realism. If realism is characterized by these properties, the kind of quasi-theological commitments which Derrida attributes to drama, then deconstruction poses a serious problem for realism. The effect of deconstruction on literary criticism would seem, then, to be a radical critique and renunciation of realism. Within such a critique, realism can be cited only to support, despite itself, deconstructionist arguments against presence and representation.

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[54]Derrida doesn't mention Dostoevsky, but the question of the death of God looms large in his novels, especially, of course, *The Brothers Karamazov*.

This move has certainly been made in some developments in literary theory: an antithesis has been posited between realism and deconstruction, and we turn now to consider some of these developments which have mobilized one or more of the critical movements discussed in this and the previous chapter. In my analysis of these developments, I shall try to show that the credibility of their theoretical contributions relies upon a reductive apprehension of realism which gives rise to the seeming antithesis between critical theory and realism. Questioning such an apprehension, I suggest, necessarily calls into question that antithetical relationship and, in Part II of this study, I shall try to show how a different relationship might be understood, a relationship which reconciles the critical disposition of, for example, Macherey or Derrida, with continued attention to realism.

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Critical practices and the end of realism

'What giants ?' asked Sancho Panza.
- Cervantes

In the previous two chapters, we have surveyed a range of theories which seek, in various ways, to bring to the study of literature, and of the human sciences in general, a critical perspective. In Chapter 1, theories which located this critical perspective in an awareness of and attention to language were discussed. For Booth, the object of critique was what he saw as a kind of disingenuity in reading, a wilful effacement of the rhetoric of fiction, and he sought to revive an Aristotelian concern with language and rhetoric. The Formalists and structuralists similarly used language as a focus of critical theory; the Formalists by insisting upon a constantly renewed approach to words, and the structuralists through what Barthes called "the imagination of the sign." For both groups of theorists, literature played an important role in the achievement of this kind of critical insight because it constitutes a concentrated exercise in language through which words, as per the Formalists, may be renewed, or in which the operation of signs, as per the structuralists, may be observed.

For the Formalists, perhaps, and for the structuralists, certainly, a failure critically to appreciate language indicates a general incapacity to achieve a critical perspective. In Chapter 2, approaches which have tried to achieve this general critical position were considered. The Frankfurt School conflated the critical with what might be called a non-teleological or negative dialectic which constantly tries to dispel posited socio-cultural certainties - social institutions, literary genres - a process which begins with concrete examples, such as, in the case of Adorno, musical conventions, but extends from this sociological basis to a philosophical/conceptual level. Fredric Jameson, in his analysis of Adorno, charts this extension:

> it is this optical illusion of the substantiality of thought itself which negative dialectics is designed to dispel.[1]

This version of critical thought - Critical Theory - assigns to art and literature this *negative* function. As we have seen, Critical Theory, where it is concerned with literature, suggests that literature can somehow embody the essence of negation, it can *be* the critical, as long, that is, as it dissociates itself from any vestiges of positivism. It would be instructive to try to assess whether the aesthetics which are supposed to achieve this actually constitute a new orthodoxy, which would consign them to a place in a teleological dialectic, perhaps, but would undermine the broader claims for them. But such a critique is outside the scope of this study. We must be content here to place this example of critical thought in the background of this inquiry, assimilating it as one example of how, in the name of critical theory, the "end" of realism has been called for.

For Althusser, theoretical critique was, perhaps, more difficult to achieve. His suspicion of experience led him to seek a kind of disembodied, incorruptible vantage point from which to pursue a stainless science of theory. The place of art in such a science is, as Althusser concedes, very complicated but like the Frankfurt School, at least in this respect, both Althusser and Macherey try to assimilate literature and the theory of literature into their vision of a critical science, theoretical Marxism. Once again, we can infer a fairly simple proposition from these complicated theories: to be critical is to be suspicious of all forms of commonly held beliefs, which would include the idea of reality which seems to be countenanced by the realistic novel, and art, in our case literature, must be critical. Derrida's philosophical strategies would seem also to support this proposition. But where Althusser sought to ground critique in the theoretical - as opposed to the experiential - Derrida's critical method requires a renunciation of the need for such a grounding. The deconstructionist figures of play, and of absence, demand a relaxation of the anxiety which might be occasioned by the idea of a groundless critique. For Derrida, such a relaxation, which is, of course, not merely a reversal of anxiety but a fundamental revision of the grounds of anxiety, constitutes the possibility of what we are here calling the critical.

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[1]Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, p.57.

While, as we have seen, some of these demands for a critical theory, or, perhaps, a theory of the critical which suggests how a critical position might be achieved, are seriously flawed, it doesn't necessarily follow that the critical, in the sense conceived of by these various theories, is invalid. As I have said, this study challenges the perceived antithesis between realism and critical theory and, therefore, necessarily entails a critique of theories which seem either to lead towards or explicitly to advocate such an antithesis. Before, however, this critique of these kinds of critical theories can proceed, it is helpful to consider some of the more explicit and more polemic manifestations of hostility towards realism in the name of being critical.

(a) Critical practice and classic realism

In the work of Shklovsky, or of Adorno, or of Derrida, to name some of the theorists with whom we have been concerned, it is possible to see how a concomitant commitment to what might be called anti-realism may be inferred. Indeed, it is not only a matter of inference. Theories which have advocated or claimed a critical position have often posited aesthetic revolution as the counterpart to philosophical and political progression. Vincent Descombes makes just this point with reference to this tendency as it was associated with the *Tel Quel* group in the 1960s:

> 'progressive' novels would not be those whose content refers to the experience of the workers ... but those which in one way or another transgress or endanger the code of the novel. The progressive writer will then be Joyce or Mallarmé, not Zola or Aragon.

And he adds this note:

> *Tel Quel* popularized these themes in the sixties. However, they leaped directly to the conclusion (that a literary avant-garde is *ipso-facto* the political avant-garde) without troubling themselves unduly over the isomorphism between the novel form and bourgeois modes of power.[2]

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[2]Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, p.127.

Contemporary literary theory has inherited this iconoclasm, has its own version of Mayakovsky's celebrated call to "burn Raphael." The development of realism in the novel, contemporaneous with what Jameson calls "the *bourgeois cultural revolution*",[3] conflates an aesthetic intention towards social and historical reality with an uncritical approach towards that reality, as well as a mistaken understanding of the nature and possibilities of literature. When the moment of bourgeois culture passes, so too, such a view would suggest, will realism, and perhaps the novel, maybe even literature. Realism, the "ends" - aims, intentions, achievements - of which are indissociable with those of the bourgeoisie, middle-class, cultural elite, or whatever, will, inevitably come to an "end."

In Catherine Belsey's primer of critical theory, *Critical Practice*, this kind of rejection of realism is very much in evidence. Belsey argues that realistic aesthetics presuppose a "common sense" approach to literary criticism, and goes on to claim that "common sense itself is ideologically and discursively constructed, rooted in a specific historical situation and operating in conjunction with a particular social formation."[4] She invokes, variously, Barthes, Lacan, Althusser and Derrida in support of this claim, and concludes that common sense, as she has defined it,

> proposes a *humanism* based on an *empiricist-idealist* interpretation of the world. In other words, common sense urges that 'man' is the origin and source of meaning, of action, and of history (*humanism*). Our concepts and our knowledge are held to be the product of experience (*empiricism*), and this experience is preceded and interpreted by the mind, reason, or thought, the property of a transcendent human nature whose essence is the attribute of each individual (*idealism*). These propositions, radically called in question by the implications of post-Saussurean linguistics, constitute the basis of a practice of reading which assumes, whether explicitly or implicitly, the theory of expressive realism. This is the theory that literature reflects the *reality* of experience as it is perceived by one (especially gifted) individual, who *expresses* it in a discourse which enables other individuals to recognize it as true.[5]

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[3]Fredric Jameson, "The Realist Floor-Plan", in Marshall Blonsky ed., *On Signs* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), p.373.
[4]Belsey, *Critical Practice* , p.3.
[5]Belsey, *Critical Practice*, p.7.

These arguments provide the basis for Belsey's critical theory which, she claims, as we have already seen, makes clear that "the theory of literature as expressive realism is no longer tenable."[6] To continue to believe in what she calls "Aristotelian" aesthetics, she claims, is to remain critically naive. More specifically, according to Belsey, it is to rely on the *lisible* text (in Barthes' terminology), to be ideological (in an Althusserian sense), to be neurotic (in a Lacanian sense), or to subscribe to *presence* (as theorized by Derrida). Belsey thus mobilizes much of the critical thought we have discussed in this part of the present study *against* what she calls "classic realism."

It would, however, be sophistic to rely upon Belsey's polemic against classic realism to disprove the antithesis between realism and critical theory. Although Belsey seems to overlook that what is generally understood as realism - and what she calls realism - is not equivalent but only tangentially related to what Aristotle called *mimesis*, and that her indictment of realism fails to mention, or only mentions in passing, major theorists of realism such as Lukács and Auerbach, reliance upon these shortcomings is a poor foundation for a challenge to the rejection of realism, and for an alternative critical theory of realism. Certainly, in her polemic, Belsey is not alone. Colin MacCabe has also argued against the view that "narrative discourse functions simply as a window on reality",[7] from a structuralist/post-structuralist position similar to that of Belsey, and Terry Eagleton, in his influential introduction to literary theory, approvingly cites Barthes as maintaining that "there is a literary ideology which corresponds to this 'natural attitude', and its name is realism."[8]

Both critical theory proper, by which I mean the work of the theorists disussed in chapters 1 and 2, and literary theory which has been subsequently influenced by critical theory, then, seem either to be announcing or proposing a radical end to realism. At best, following this movement of thought, realism - the concept, the practice, and even the literary texts - is unhelpful and, at worst, obstructive, to critical thinking. If realistic literature is to be considered, its representational qualities must be

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[6]Belsey, *Critical Practice*, p.46.
[7]Colin MacCabe, *James Joyce and the Revolution of the Word* (London: Macmillan, 1978), p.15.
[8]Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), p.135.

turned against the text itself; it must be defamiliarized, made *scriptible*, deconstructed.

Belsey's suggestion that mimesis is no longer *tenable* is a revealing one, because she clearly supposes that contemporary critical thought has no more use for such aesthetics. Other recent developments in critical theory, such as postmodernism[9] and some strains of post-colonialism[10] have argued against the inhibiting, uncritical aspects of literary realism.

This antithesis between realistic representation and critical thought is not, however, beyond synthesis. As I have said, it is not sufficient simply to argue against the excesses or shortcomings, obscurities or inconsistencies of theories which have tried, in various ways, to be critical. It is necessary to establish an independent connection between a critical disposition and the representational properties of realism. It is not the case that a flaw in a particular critical theory means that the objects of critique are thereby vindicated or validated; it is not, I think, reasonable to claim that, for example, Lukács is right because Bloch is shortsighted or overenthusiastic in his defence of Expressionism. Rather, the critique of critical theory must take it seriously, its own method must be critical.

(b) The critique of critical theory

There are, in a sense, two different ways in which the critical theory might itself be criticized and the antithesis between critical theory and realistic representation taken up. The first would be fundamentally to oppose the

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[9]With regard to postmodernism, see Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp.73 ff. Other writers have posited the divide between realistic representation and post-modernism more explicitly. See, for example, Marguerite Alexander, *Flights from Realism: Themes and Strategies in Postmodernist British and American Fiction* (London: Edward Arnold, 1990), p.6.

[10] The question of 'realism' in post-colonial theory, and, indeed, the field itself, seems to me to be particularly vexed. On the one hand, Ashcroft *et al* write of the "illusion, continually undermined by post-colonial literature, ... that literary discourse constitutes a process of mimetic representation", a position which they derive from Homi Bhabha; see Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989), p.55. On the other hand, Chidi Amuta, drawing both on classical Marxist sociology and on twentieth-century African political radicalism, countenances a complicated, but important, place for "realism" in the context of African literary studies; see Chidi Amuta, *The Theory of African Literature: Implications for Practical Criticism* (London: Zed Books, 1989), pp.127-128.

tenets of the different kinds of critical thought which have been advanced against realistic representation.[11] Such an approach - which has occasionally claimed to be, or has been accused of being, what might erroneously be called anti-theoretical - would suggest that the critical aspect of literary theory is little more than intellectual posturing, and that the sheer abstraction of much critical thought is a front for meaningless, nihilistic iconoclasm. Lukács' accusation that his Frankfurt School adversaries lived in the "Grand Hotel Abyss" is, perhaps, among the more elegant charges of this kind.

Certainly, the various critical theories which I have been discussing are not without their problems. As we have seen, Althusser's anti-humanist science of theory is grounded upon an ineluctable contradiction, and, paradoxically, Derrida's critique of language is, as we have discussed, mounted in language. As well as these problems of critical theory, there are also the shortcomings and excesses of "theoretical" literary criticism which adopts certain critical theories over-enthusiastically.

The critical element of these directions in thought is, however, an important element of literary studies. Recalling Descombes' characterization of the critical as not content to take "the way it is" for granted, we can see that each of the theories discussed in the first two sections of this part of the present study can contribute to a critical dimension in literary studies. Relentlessly subjecting the seeming premises of literature to critical scrutiny works against fixed or static conceptions of literature, opening new and challenging possibilities for literary criticism.

I propose, therefore, a different way of taking issue with these theoretical positions over the issue of realistic representation. Rather than challenge the critical efforts of, for example, Adorno or Macherey, I shall try to show,

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[11]Works which take such an approach include: Raymond Tallis, *In Defence of Realism* (London: Edward Arnold, 1988); Richard Freadman and Seamus Miller, *Re-thinking Theory*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); John Orr, *Tragic Realism & Modern Society: The Passionate Political in the Modern Novel* , 2nd ed., (London: Macmillan, 1989); A.D. Nuttall, *A New Mimesis*; John Ellis, *Against Deconstruction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989). Grouping these works together is not meant to suggest that they express the same ideas in the same fashion, nor am I necessarily or uniformly hostile to these works. On the one hand, I have found some to be unproductively dismissive of critical theory, and would seek to distance my argument from theirs. On the other, to some, particularly Ellis and Nuttall, I am greatly indebted.

in the following section of this thesis, that realistic representation is not incompatible with critical thought. With regard to Macherey in particular, insofar as he insists upon the implicit tension within literary texts, my own theory must acknowledge an affinity, and, indeed, an influence.[12]

In an essay entitled "Mimesis and Representation", Paul Ricœur addresses this problem, beginning by acknowledging that "[f]or contemporary philosophy, representation is a great culprit."[13] Ricœur's response to this problem anticipates the ambition of this study:

> Representation ... it is said, should be denounced as the reduplication of presence, as the re-presenting of presence.
> My project will be to try to extricate representation from the impasse to which it has been relegated, to return it to its field of play, without, however, in any way weakening the critique which I have just mentioned.[14]

Ricœur sets about this project by returning to Aristotle and Augustine to tap what he calls the polysemic resources of the idea of *mimesis*, which, he suggests, accepts or assimilates the philosophical critique of representation without abandoning representation. My own project is similar, although it is concerned with a specific *kind* of representation: the realistic novel. The similarity is that I do not wish to discourage or renounce the relentless need for a critical perspective in literary theory, I wish, in fact, to preserve some of the critical insights discussed in chapters 1 and 2, while departing from the conclusions about realism arrived at by some of these theorists and by the literary theorists discussed in this chapter.

The points at which I depart from the critical theories discussed so far, and from which I advance my critique are the ideas of the "ends" and the "end" of realism. We have seen above how these critical theories generally posit a distinction between their own practice and another, more

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[12]I mention Macherey in particular because he seems to be acutely sensitive to the tension between critique and skepticism, an important point overlooked, perhaps, by other, later literary theorists.
[13]Paul Ricœur, "Mimesis and Representation"(1980) in Mario J. Valdés ed., *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and Imagination* (Hemel Hempstead: Harverster Wheatsheaf, 1991), p.137.
[14]Ricœur, "Mimesis and Representation", p.137.

naive way of understanding reality. Althusser's conflation of ideology with Cartesianism[15] is particularly telling. Similarly, Derrida's critique of metaphysics cites the failure of the metaphysical to understand itself; it relies, then, on an unquestioned and unquestionable concept. The critical, then, confronts the naive, the metaphysical, the theological, the ideological; anything which seems to rely upon, propose, or accept without sufficient question a notion or model of the absolute, of the natural, or, to return to Descombes' definition of the critical with which we are working, of "the way it is."

But when such critique is turned upon realism, it is necessary to ask whether such properties, such "ends," really belong to realism. Put another way, on the question of realism, have critical theorists properly identified their opponent, or are they, like Don Quixote, tilting at windmills? The critical syllogism that because of these "ends" the "end" of realism is necessary relies upon a conflation of realism with negative[16] philosophical linguistic, political and aesthetic commitments. Jameson's characterization of the age of realism as what Deleuze calls "decoding" pointedly evokes such a view, suggesting that the increasing emphasis on the social world during the nineteenth-century gave rise to a new "faith" in the absolute nature of the social world, of the Real.

Descartes' separation of subject and object, Kant's idealistic critique, bourgeois ideology, and the literary phenomenon with which we are concerned, realism, then, become cousins in an extended family of *un*critical or, as Eagleton puts it, natural attitudes and assumptions. To understand literature as realistic is to rely, somewhere along the line, on a position which according to one or another critical theory is philosophically, aesthetically, or politically untenable.

But this conflation is, I suggest, mistaken. Realistic novels are not giants, and the "end" of realism is, then, a Quixotic attack which derives from a fundamental misapprehension. That there is such a misapprehension, however, cannot be established simply by criticizing critical theory, it can only be established by showing that realism is something other than what

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[15]See Chapter 2 above.

[16]The term "negative" is used here in a strictly evaluative sense. Functionally, it would be more accurate to suggest that realism is conflated with "positive" or positivistic commitments.

has been proposed. These critical theories, I suggest, betray their own critical shortcomings when it comes to the apprehension of realism, shortcomings which are most pointedly evident in the kind of literary criticism discussed in this chapter, criticism which claims to have discovered, effected, or moved beyond the end of realism.

In the following part I shall principally discuss three twentieth-century literary theorists whose work establishes the possibility of a synthesis between realism and critical theory. In doing so, I shall not only be reassessing the position of realism within literary theory but also suggesting that a critical ambition is more thoroughly realized in these kinds of theoretical approaches than in approaches which charge off to fight giants where there are only windmills. Indeed, while some of the critical projects discussed in chapters 1 and 2 are, to some extent, congenial with my own approach, critical theory often runs the risk of relapsing into the very reductionism and naivety against which it purports to set itself. This, without making too much of this point, is characteristic of the theories discussed in the first part of this chapter.

This, however, is not to say that the theories to which we shall turn in the following part are flawless. Indeed, the case of Georg Lukács, which is considered in chapter 4, is particularly vexed, marked by an uneasy mixture of enduring critical analysis and thoughtless polemical diatribe. Nonetheless, it is an important element of critical theory that it concedes that no critical position is inviolable, no perspective beyond revision. Such a concession, as we have seen, might also be said to be a property of some of the positions discussed above; of, for example, Derrida's critique of the human sciences, or of Macherey's theory of the text. This similarity does not, of course, mean that Derrida's and Macherey's positions are equivalent to those of Lukács, Auerbach, and Bakhtin, or even to each other. But the possibility of drawing such a parallel between them does suggest that a hard and fast antithesis between realism and critical theory is unsustainable. In order to bear out this suggestion, I shall take Lukács, Auerbach, and Bakhtin, in turn, undertaking detailed analyses of their work which will go towards articulating a synthesis of critical theory and realism.

II

Realism: A Critical Background

In the previous section of this study, the critical structures of theories which have challenged or questioned realism were explicated and analysed in some detail. While the various critical authors discussed focus upon different things, such as language or history, and employ different methods, they share a commitment to a particular idea of the critical. This idea of the critical is necessarily antithetical to any forms of knowledge which rest upon principles of essentialism. Both Adorno and Derrida, for example, characterize the phenomena against which they set their critique as quasi-theological; knowledge is conflated with belief or faith, which is either simply naive, or which masks a more sinister cultural phenomenon, such as ideology.

The critical, to recall Descombes description, never takes "the way it is" for an answer, but sees it as a question. Belief or faith, it is suggested, are the antithesis of this attitude, they *do* take "the way it is" as an answer, and it becomes necessary then, for critical theory to undermine them. Derrida and Adorno, as we have seen, opt for strategies of radical negation, while other theorists search for new and different uses of language, different literary genres, or, as in the case of Macherey, new interpretive strategies which identify and juxtapose contrary ideas within objects. Generally, critical theories characterize knowledge, and other cultural phenomena, as *problems* to which there can be no final answer.

The theories discussed in Part I generally implicate literary realism as a form of cognitive faith. According to such a position, the existence of the real social world is taken for granted and the representational capacity of literature is then simply exercised to achieve verisimilitude. The equation of literary realism with cognitive essentialism is most pointedly evident in Belsey's suggestion that it is an empiricist-idealist presupposition which enables literary realism. Both empiricism and idealism - although they are very complicated ideas - seem to countenance the possibility of eventually recognizing, once and for all, "the way it is." Critical theory and realism, then, are necessarily antithetical.

This antithesis, however, is not unsurpassable. For the antithesis between realism and critical theory to be maintained, the correlation between realism and cognitive essentialism must be assumed. However, as I shall try to establish in this part, such a correlation is mistaken, and a more careful examination of both the theory and practice of realism can reveal that realism is itself a highly critical literary phenomenon. In this part of my thesis I shall explore and analyse the works of three critical authors in order to show that there is a synthetic congeniality between the realistic novel and critical theory, and I shall try to justify my preference for literary theory which makes productive use of the idea of realism. This does not, however, imply that realism is necessarily a preferable aesthetic. Rather, I suggest that theories which are able to make productive use of realism evince a critical awareness and an intellectual inquisitiveness which provide more interesting theoretical foundations from which to advance literary criticism in general.

It is not the case that there is a simple antithesis between Parts I and II; as indicated in the short introduction to Part I, critical genealogies and affinities, which traverse the boundaries between what might be called literature and the theory of literature, are complicated, and, as I suggested in the previous chapter, it is possible to trace such affinities between some of the material discussed in chapters 1 and 2 and the theories discussed and endorsed in this part.

Such possibilities, however, are not specifically under examination here. It would be digressive, and perhaps impossible, within this study to try to argue the affinities between, say, Althusser's efforts to disembody critique and the early Lukács' residual Platonism which tried similarly to get outside experience. Parallels such as this may be drawn in passing, but the purpose of this part is not to suggest that Adorno and Auerbach, for example, are somehow identical. Rather, the four chapters which compose this part are concerned with the background to the critical endorsement of realism which the theorists discussed evince.

The "background", as we have seen, figures importantly in the method of this inquiry. It is, firstly, one of the characteristics of realism; realistic novels place their stories against a recognizable social and historical

background. Then there is the background to this study itself, the contest over realism which has long occupied aesthetic theorists. But background is a curious phenomenon; instead of seeing the realistic novel as, say, *replete* with background, I have adopted Auerbach's phrase "*fraught* with background" to indicate the complexity of both of these kinds of background, that of the realistic novel, and that of the present inquiry.

The idea of background is central to the logic of this study. Each study of an individual theorist will be an exploration of what we might call their critical background, the history and development of their theoretical positions. In the cases of Lukács and Auerbach, the analysis of this background serves as an inquiry into why, in their aesthetic theories, realism held such an important position. Neither, of course, was concerned exclusively with realism, indeed, as we shall see, at one stage Lukács' aesthetic tendencies steered *away* from the realistic. But realism in general, and the realistic novel in particular, according to both Lukács and Auerbach, served important philosophical ends.

My analysis of the work of Lukács and Auerbach, then, will seek to understand why, and from what theoretical basis, each arrived at such a view of realism. More specifically, I shall try to show that the critical background to their preferences for realism coincides with what we are calling the critical. Their own critical backgrounds, I shall try to show, evince a critical apprehension of the idea of background which informs realism. This apprehension, which is no more satisified with "the way it is" than any of the approaches discussed in the previous part, generates, I suggest, a more critical appreciation of the realistic novel than is evident in the kinds of theories which propose the end of realism. This kind of view enables a synthesis of the two ideas with which this thesis is concerned; critical theory and the realistic novel.

But Auerbach's theory is not infallible, and Lukács' is certainly not. In the course of my analysis of their work I shall not be proposing a simple application of their theories, but rather trying to show how their complicated critical backgrounds might serve as yet another background to my own suggestions that such a synthesis is possible, that the previously maintained antithesis is unsustainable, and that contemporary literary theory is better served by such a background.

In Chapter 6 I shall turn to Mikhail Bakhtin, the analysis of whom requires a different approach to that taken towards Lukács and Auerbach. A change is necessary because while, as I shall be suggesting, the intellectual backgrounds of all three theorists are not dissimilar, and their theories provide comparable backgrounds to the present study, the place of realism in Bakhtin's scheme is different. In the cases of Lukács and Auerbach, I shall be proceeding from their endorsements of realism, and trying then to determine what kind of background to this endorsement might be inferred, and how such a background can be called critical. With Bakhtin, the procedure is, in a sense, reversed. I shall begin from his status and reputation as a critical thinker, proceed to try to determine what kind of critical method he employs, and then turn to how the realistic novel might fit into such a critical scheme. Bakhtin did not turn to realism nearly so much as Lukács and Auerbach, although, as we shall see, it was among the many literary phenomena which he considered. I shall be suggesting, however, that the kind of critical method employed by Bakhtin also makes possible a synthesis of realism and critical theory. The kind of critical apprehension of the realistic novel which informs this thesis is compatible with the tenets of Bakhtin's critical theory.

The final chapter in this part essentially concludes the theoretical section of this thesis. I shall try to make clear my own critical position regarding realism and show how it emerges from the critical background provided by the various critical theories discussed in this thesis. In so doing, I shall try to redefine the realistic novel from a theoretical position which preserves the representational claims of realism but simultaneously sees in these claims the starting-point of critical analysis. Rather than characterizing realism as a sort of critical other *against* which critical theory must operate, I shall try to show how, from a different critical background, realism can serve as an important literary idea *from* which critical theory can advance. The background of the question of realism is thus revised from an antithesis between realism and critical theory to a synthesis of the two, which, I suggest, enriches our understanding of both.

Follwing this discussion, I shall turn to putting this theory into practice. Part III comprises two essays on two very different texts, of which realism is one important aspect. As we shall see, the theory of realism which is the

central thesis of this study depends upon a critical attitude which balances the possibilities and necessity of realism in literature with a constant critique of realism, a refusal to elevate realism to the status of a kind of literary objectivity. In my reading of *Middlemarch*, and of *U.S.A.*, I shall try to show how such a theory can be employed in the reading of literary texts, which is, of course, the very substance of literary studies. The reconvergence of theory and practice is also among the ambitions of this study, and in Part III I shall try to show how realism contributes to this reconvergence.

- 4 -

The tragedy of Georg Lukács

O sages standing in God's holy fire
As in the gold mosaic of a wall,
Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,
And be the singing masters of my soul.
- W.B. Yeats

In the case of Georg Lukács, we can speak of "tragedy" in a number of ways. We might, for example, characterize him and his career as tragic in the sense that George Lichtheim characterized them as "disastrous," lamenting the corruption and eventual loss of a brilliant European intellect.[1] This "tragedy" might then be extrapolated to the general tragedy of Marxism, its regression and eventual decline. Lukács, it might be said, shared the fate of Marxism; hijacked by party orthodoxy he, like the very movement, strayed from his philosophical and moral ambitions, and purged his dissident thoughts, and those of others, as surely as dissident voices were exiled from, or silenced in, the contemporary political environment.

However, tragedy also figures in Lukács' work without reference to his political biography. As we shall see, for the early Lukács, the tragic represented the possibility of achieving the kind of aesthetic epiphany which Yeats sought in Byzantium; the changeless, the essential. But the tragic is dangerously volatile ground on which to build, and Lukács' pursuit of the essential became, in a sense, its own tragedy. His persistent search for what he variously called form, soul, totality, class consciousness, was accompanied by an awareness of the unattainability of these essentials. In a sense, the tragic flaw of Lukács work is that his means preclude his end. It is in this ineluctable clash, I suggest, that the critical interest of Lukács' contribution to literary theory lies. It is from this tension in Lukács work that I propose to advance my analysis of his theory of realism, and to show how it contributes to the present study.

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[1]See George Lichtheim, "An Intellectual Disaster", in his *The Concept of Ideology and Other Essays* (New York: Random House, 1967).

Lukács' defence of realism is well-known, especially in the context of his debate with Brecht, Bloch, and various members of the Frankfurt School.[2] At its worst, Lukács' analysis of modern art is vulgar and thoughtless, and vacillates between apology for his classical and bourgeois tastes, Soviet orthodoxy and political expediency. On the other hand, it is necessary to try to place Lukács' defence of realism in the context of his work as a whole. While, as we shall see, Lukács' preference for realism is certainly a reactionary impulse, it is not *only* reactionary. If the different moments of Lukács' literary theory are carefully considered, there is a discernible continuity which suggests that Lukács's preference for realism stems also from his original philosophical inquiries, inquiries which, while seriously flawed, are nonetheless motivated by a critical disposition.

As a Marxist, of course, Lukács sought to understand the problems of literature and history sociologically, an approach which took up a long tradition of Marxist criticism which leaned towards literary realism. Marx and Engels had famously expressed their preference for realism in literature, Lenin wrote on Tolstoy as the "mirror of the revolution", and Trotsky wrote against Formalism and on historical objectivity in art. Pre-Soviet Russian liberals, such as V.I. Belinsky and N.G. Chernyshevsky similarly maintained an aesthetic of social realism.[3] As the dynamic, developmental nature of Marxism and Communism gave way, under Stalinist autocracy, this "realist" aesthetic developed into Socialist realism, a literary sub-genre which certainly *does* claim to represent absolute truth, and with which Lukács had, to say the least, a curious relationship.

An analysis of Lukács' understanding of the relationship between literature and social historical reality cannot be limited, however, to his

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[2] I do not want here to suggest that Lukács' antagonists were in any sense homogenous. Adorno, of course, was highly critical of Brecht, and of his relationship with Benjamin; see Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, pp.201-202; Adorno, *Notes to Literature*, pp.222-223.

[3] For Marx and Engels, see their correspondence with Lasalle; Lenin, "Articles on Tolstoy"; Trotsky, "The Formalist School of Poetry and Marxism". These are anthologized in David Craig, *Marxists on Literature: An Anthology* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), and Lenin's articles are included in full as an appendix to the English translation of Macherey's *A Theory of Literary Production*, trans. Geoffrey Wall (London: Routledge, 1978). See also *Leon Trotsky on Literature and Art*, ed. Paul N. Siegel (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970). For Belinsky and Chernyshevsky, see Becker, *Documents of Modern Literary Realism*. A good analysis and discussion of literary realism in the early-Soviet context is provided in Andrew Milner, *Cultural Materialism* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1993), pp.24ff.

later Marxist period. Unusual among heavyweight Marxist intellectuals, Lukács committed himself to Soviet orthodoxy, and while the idea of a radical break in Lukács' thought following his recantation of *History and Class Consciousness* is not, as we shall see, tenable, it is fair to say that the standard of his earlier writing is not maintained throughout his career.[4]

Lukács' biographical complexities notwithstanding[5], the following analysis will consider a selection of Lukács' work which ranges from his very early essays to his continued defence of realism in the post-Stalin era. In doing so I shall try to show how Lukács' concern with the relationship between literature and reality is premised upon certain *critical* positions which imply a problematic theory of realistic representation. György Márkus, in arguing for a complex idea of *culture* as "the 'single' thought of Lukács' life", suggests such an approach:

> The real link between the *Heidelberg Manuscripts* and the late *Aesthetics* is that both works, although they were separated by almost half a century, use completely different conceptual tools, and frequently

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[4]The question of whether or not there is a fundamental break - or more than one perhaps - in Lukács' work is extremely important to this study. As will become apparent, I hold to the view that, while there are extremely important differences between, say, *Soul and Form*, and *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, the discernible continuities are more important. But this view is certainly not incontestable, and it has, indeed, been contested at length. George Lichtheim exemplifies the tendency to posit a break in Lukács thought after *History and Class Consciousness*; see "An Intellectual Disaster" and Lichtheim, *Lukács* (London: Fontana, 1970), at p. 58 and p.76 ff. René Wellek supports this view, arguing that there is a break between the early and late Lukács and that to suggest otherwise runs the risk of characterizing Lukács' Marxism as a kind of pretence; see René Wellek, *Four Critics: Croce, Valéry, Lukács, Ingarden* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1981), p.38. Lukács himself seems to have been ambivalent on this point. On the one hand, he seems to have seen his intellectual progression as a series of philosophical revelations, which would suggest that important changes were made along the way. On the other hand, he also suggests that these changes were not necessarily fundamental, but rather stages in a continuous development. The view that Lukács' work *is* continuous is expressed by Fredric Jameson, who argues that the myth of Lukács' career needs reconsideration, and that the predominant view of his later work as aberrant is misconceived; see Jameson,*Marxism and Form*, pp.161-162. This view is supported by György Márkus in "Life and the Soul: the Young Lukács and the Problem of Culture" in Agnes Heller ed., *Lukács Revalued* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983). Márkus' article canvasses both Lukács' "conversion" to Marxism in 1918, as well has his development as a Marxist.

[5]The following works have been invaluable in placing Lukács' work within a biographical context: G.H.R. Parkinson, *George Lukács*(London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977); George Lichtheim, *Lukács* ; Michael Löwy, *George Lukács - From Romanticism to Bolshevism*, trans. P. Camiller (London: New Left Books, 1979); Lee Congdon, *The Young Lukács* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983); Arpad Kadarkay, *George Lukács: Life, Thought, and Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1991); Georg Lukács, *Record of a Life: An Autobiographical Sketch*, ed. István Eörsi, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 1983).

> come to opposite conclusions, are nevertheless devoted to one and the same theoretical problem. Both are attempts to establish the place and function of art within the system of human activities and to explain its relationship with everyday life (in the terminology employed by the young Lukács, its relationship with 'experienced reality') and with the 'generic' forms of human activity and objectivation ... that shape and appropriate reality.[6]

Apart from asserting a complex continuity in Lukács' work, Márkus also highlights Lukács' concern with the human, cultural, constructive aspects of "reality." Neither naive empiricism nor sheer subjective idealism - although Lukács is in many respects an idealist - is an adequate approach to understanding this idea of reality, this idea of the social human world. Lukács' concern, then, is with the kind of historical reality posited by Vico - to whom we shall return - a view of reality as fragile, incomplete, and contingent. Recalling, once again, Descombes' definition of the critical, Markus' account of Lukács certainly suggests that his approach meets such criteria. For Lukács, nothing is merely given, nothing is simply "the way it is." That he was uneasy with this insight generated his relentless idealism, his search for something beyond everyday reality. That he never found such a resolution was, at once, his most enduring philosophical legacy, and his tragedy.

(a) Tragedy and irony in the early Lukács

The collection of essays *Soul and Form*, is marked by a deep Romantic aestheticism on Lukács' part.[7] Essay after essay reveals a profound dissatisfaction with everyday life and a will towards an aesthetic perfection which would transcend ordinary life - what he calls a "longing for form."

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[6] Márkus, "Life and the Soul", p.3.

[7] The relationship between these essays and Lukács' own life has been the subject of much critical commentary, particularly the importance of the tragic relationship between Lukács and Irma Seidler. The following works discuss this in some depth: Agnes Heller, "Georg Lukács and Irma Seidler", in *Lukacs Revalued;* Kadarkay, *George Lukács*, p.114; Löwy, *From Romanticism to Bolshevism*, at p.103. Löwy cites Agnes Heller in support of the idea that Seidler's impact upon Lukács' work was considerable. Lukács himself acknowledges this, in a curiously abrupt statement in *Record of a Life*. He says: " Irma Seidler was related to the Polányi family and I had an extremely important encounter with her in 1907. Whether it should be called love or not is another question, but she had a tremendously powerful influence on my development between 1907 and 1911. In that year she committed suicide"; *Record of a Life*, p.37.

His essay "The Metaphysics of Tragedy" puts his Romantic disillusionment in these terms:

> Life is an anarchy of dark and light: nothing is ever completely fulfilled in life, nothing ever quite ends; new, confusing voices always mingle with the chorus of those that have been heard before. Everything flows, everything merges into another thing, and the mixture is uncontrolled and impure; everything is destroyed.[8]

Reviving a philosophical distrust of experience which might variously be seen in Plato, Kant, and Kierkegaard, Lukács develops an antithesis between ordinary life and some sort of essential, pure idea of life - which is confusingly called, in English at least, "real" life - which is realized Lukács says, in tragedy:

> The tragic experience, then, is a beginning and an end at the same time. Everyone at such a moment is newly born ...
> The reaity of such a (tragic) world can have nothing in common with that of temporal existence. Realism is bound to destroy all the form-creating and life-maintaining values of tragic drama ... The inner style of drama is realistic within the medieval, scholastic meaning of the word, but this excludes all modern realism.(*SF*, p159)[9]

In the essay on Kierkegaard, "The Foundering of Form Against Life", Lukács was concerned with this same antithesis between life-as-experience and life-as-form. Again, Lukács characterizes life as formless:

> ... when a man looks about him he does not see roads and crossroads, nor any sharply distinct choices anywhere; everything flows, everything is transmuted into something else.(*SF*, p.31)

Against this formlessness, he says, Kierkegaard - who "saw more clearly than any other the thousand aspects, the thousand-fold variability of every

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[8]Georg Lukács, *Soul and Form*, trans. Anna Bostock (Budapest, 1910; Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1974), pp.152-153. Further references to this volume (hereafter, *SF*) will be included in the text.

[9]The difference between the term realism as it is used in medieval philosophy and in modern literary criticism has been discussed above.

motive"(*SF*, p.28) - asserted the form-giving gesture: his inexplicable and unexplained rejection of his fiancée Regine Olsen. This "gesture," Lukács argued, transcended ordinary life, gave an absolute, immutable "form" to Kierkegaard's life. In the world of experience Kierkegaard, perhaps, burnt his bridges, but metaphysically he entered the realm of the absolute, transcending the mere relativism of the experienced world. In trying to maintain his gesture, Kierkegaard sought to "create forms from life"(*SF*, p.40).

This early Romantic inclination in Lukács', his tendency, as Lichtheim puts it, to seek "refuge from actuality in the realm of art"[10], seems at odds with his later commitment to realism. Two important aspects of Lukács' aestheticism need, however, to be considered. Firstly, his early aesthetics display an acute awareness of the *problematic* aspects of "everyday life." Márkus writes:

> According to Lukács, the structures of our daily world of experience, of the "lived reality," and the general features of human communication ... appear to us as entirely natural, necessary and obvious. But these structures remain unproblematic only as long as we continue to accept this world in a dogmatic-uncritical way, so that this unproblematic acceptance is itself a categorical peculiarity of this engulfing sphere of experience. In fact, the fundamental constitutive characteristic of the lived reality is that it exhibits no maxims concerning the standard or "correct" construal of its objects.[11]

Secondly, there is Lukács' curious "solution" to this problem. In the face of this "lack of truth" in reality, Lukács opts for a distant aestheticism, strikingly similar to that of another early twentieth-century neo-Romantic, whom I have already mentioned, W.B. Yeats.[12] Lukács wants art to be his "singing master" to provide him with transcendence. But the sustainability of this solution, of what he calls "aesthetic value-

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[10]Lichtheim, *Lukács*, p.18.

[11]György Márkus, "On Georg Lukács' Unpublished Aesthetics", *The Philosophical Forum*, 3,3-4 (Spring-Summer 1972), p.310. Márkus is not referring to *Soul and Form*, but to Lukács' *Heidelberg Aesthetics*, a translated section of which follows Márkus' article. Nonetheless, the aestheticism of this piece is similar to that of *Soul and Form*.

[12]I'm not, of course, suggesting an identity or any mutual awareness between the two, but merely a kind of conceptual parallel. Compare, for example, Lukács' "Metaphysics of Tragedy" with Yeats' Byzantium poems.

realization"[13] is questionable. In *Soul and Form,* the idea of artistic form, the realization of this aesthetic withdrawal from actuality, is constantly attended by a sense of its unattainability. The essay on Kierkegaard, for example, sees Kierkegaard's "form-giving gesture" - his reconciliation of life with an absolute - collapse eventually into further indeterminacy:

> And so he died. But his death left every question open ... even Kierkegaard's death acquires a thousand meanings, becomes accidental and not really the work of destiny. And then his purest and most unambiguous gesture of his life - vain effort! - was not a gesture after all.(*SF*, p.41)

What we might call Lukács' transcendental aestheticism is, then, not transcendental at all. The relational, relativistic world of experience overcomes any sustained attempt to reconcile truth and reality. The poem may, perhaps, momentarily be absolute but the poet never will.

If we overlook Lukács' aestheticism, which strongly prefigures the kind of neo-Romantic avant-gardism evident in anti-realistic movements from the Frankfurt School to post-structuralism, we are left, then, with Lukács' view that the real world has no essence. As Márkus puts it, only a "dogmatic-uncritical" view of the world sees reality as anything other than problematic. Lukács' *critical* attitude gives rise, at this stage, to this Romantic irrationalism, but the same critical attitude was to inform later developments in his thought, particularly his negotiations between neo-Kantianism, *lebensphilosophie,* hermeneutics, and Hegelianism which gave rise to Lukács' first "great" work, *The Theory of the Novel.*[14]

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[13]Lukács, "On the Phenomenology of the Creative Process", *The Philosophical Forum* , 3, 3-4 (Spring-Summer 1972), p.325. This is the section of the *Heidelberg Aesthetics* mentioned above.

[14]Some comment on this period of Lukács' development is in order. Chapter 7, "In Bluebeard's castle", of Kadarkay's biography deals generally with this period. More specifically, Löwy discusses Lukács' development in the period between 1911 and his "conversion" to Bolshevism in 1918 in terms of his relationships with George Simmel in Berlin, Weber and others in Heidelberg, and his growing interest in Dostoevsky; see Löwy, *From Romanticism to Bolshevism,* pp.38 ff. George Lichtheim makes more explicit the connection between Lukács and Dilthey; see Lichtheim, *Lukács,* pp.13-14. These connections bear out Márkus' point regarding the centrality of problems of culture in Lukács' life work, an orientation analogous to Dilthey's development of what he (Dilthey) called the 'human sciences'; see note 3 above. Lukács himself, in the 1962 preface to *The Theory of the Novel* , characterizes the period in the following terms: " I was then in the process of turning from Kant to Hegel without, however, changing any aspect of my attitude towards the so-called intellectual sciences' school, an attitude based on my youthful enthusiasm for the work of Dilthey, Simmel and Max Weber. *The Theory of the Novel* is in effect a

With the social-historical world gripped by the onset of the Great War, Lukács' sense of the problematic nature of the world of experience, and of its spiritual poverty, is the dominant theme of *The Theory of the Novel.*[15] Once again, Lukács turns to aesthetics as refuge from the everyday world, although his aesthetic sense has shifted from the tragic Romanticism of his earlier essays to a historico-philosophical exploration of the novel as a possible resolution of the disunity of life. In a sense, Lukács' aestheticism has reversed its orientation: whereas his sense of tragedy and of the form-giving gesture suggests that form and life are irreconcilable, his analysis of the novel suggests that literature can realize and articulate a new kind of totality of life to supplement the unavailability of metaphysical totality.

Lukács begins by evoking a golden age - represented by the Greek world - of integrated civilisation, in which metaphysics and epic aesthetics happily collude to give human life unified form:

> Happy are those ages when the starry sky is the map of all possible paths - ages whose paths are illuminated by the light of the stars. Everything in such ages is new and yet familiar, full of adventure and yet their own. The world is wide and yet it is like a home, for the fire that burns in the soul is of the same essential nature as the stars; the world and the self, the light and the fire, are sharply distinct, yet they never become permanent strangers to one another, for fire is the soul of all light and all fire clothes itself in light.(*TN*, p.29)

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typical product of that school"; see Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock (Berlin, 1916; London: The Merlin Press, 1971), p.12. Further references to this work (hereafter, *TN*) will be incorporated into the text.

[15] Apparently, *The Theory of the Novel* started life as a book on Dostoevsky, to whom Lukács was drawn because of his concern with moral and spiritual problems in the secular world; see Kadarkay, *Georg Lukács*, pp.152-154; Löwy, *From Romanticism to Bolshevism*, pp.113 ff. As I shall discuss below, this is one of many striking parallels - although there are very important differences as well - between Lukács and Mikhail Bakhtin, for whom Dostoevsky provides the model of aesthetic philosophy. Other parallels start with their shared sense of a distinction between the epic and the novel (which they also share with Auerbach), and their common neo-Kantian background. According to Kadarkay, Lukács was one of many who turned, around this time, towards Dostoevskian concerns with the problems of the secular world; see Kadarkay, *Georg Lukács*, p.171. Interestingly, while Löwy charts a general Russophilia amongst Geman-speaking intellectuals (see Löwy, *From Romannticism to Bolshevism*, p.39, and p.53), Bakhtin biographers Clark and Holquist note the Germanic, and specifically neo-Kantian, influence on the intellectual environment from which Bakhtin emerged; see Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin* (Cambridge, mass.: Belknap Press, 1984), pp.57 ff.

This metaphysical unity and "homeliness" guarantees the essential being of humans within the world. Lukács writes:

> It is a homogenous world, and even the separation of man and world, between 'I' and 'you', cannot disturb its homogeneity. Like every other component of this rhythm, the soul stands in the midst of the world; the frontier that makes up its contours is not different in essence from the contours of things ...
> Even if menacing and incomprehensible forces become felt outside the circle which the stars of ever-present meaning draw round the cosmos to be experienced and formed, they cannot displace the presence of meaning; they can destroy life, but never tamper with being ... (*TN*, pp.32-33)

In some ways, *The Theory of the Novel*, is an extended lament for the loss of this spiritual integration, and a renewed effort to find, in the aesthetics of the novel, a potential resolution to a metaphysical problematic. In the integrated Greek world life is inherently meaningful and aesthetics, accordingly, reflect what Lukács calls the integration of essence and life. "Great epic writing gives form to the extensive totality of life ... the world at any given moment is an ultimate principle"(*TN*, p.46). But this given essence, even in the Greek world, eventually gives way. Lukács argues that the invention of the productivity of spirit erodes this integration of human life and essence, an erosion which is charted by the history of aesthetic forms. While the epic represents the essential immanence of life, tragedy represents the awareness that life "had lost the immanence of the essence." For the tragic hero, then, "mere life sinks into non-being" and the hero must reach a "level of being beyond life." Finally, in philosophy, essence has "completely divorced itself from life"(*TN*, p.35),[16] and has become irretrievable, even the tragic gesture is not adequate.

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[16]I have not followed Lukács' argument entirely here. Lukács' idea of the transition from form to form is clearly dialectical: epic achievement is only clearly understood in light of tragic problems, and tragic problems only fully realized in philosophical speculation. This idea is more fully developed in the following chapter of Lukács' essay which he begins by claiming that "[a]s a result of such a change in the transcendental points of orientation, (within life, exceeding life, divorced from life) art forms become subject to a historico-philosophical dialectic"; see pp.40 ff.

It is this loss of essence to which Lukács' theory of the novel responds. Repeatedly, Lukács characterizes the novel as the representative art form of the secularized world:

> The novel is the epic of an age in which the totality of life is no longer directly given, in which the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem.(*TN*, p.56)
>
> The novel is the epic of a world that has been abandoned by God.(*TN*, p.88)
>
> The novel is the form of the epoch of absolute sinfulness, as Fichte said, and it must remain the dominant form so long as the world is ruled by the same stars.(*TN*, p.152)

The novel's response to the problematized and spiritually impoverished real world is, according to Lukács, a kind of redefinition of the ideas of being, unity and totality. Whereas before the loss of immanent meaning these metaphysical properties were directly available, they are now only contingently available. Lukács has shifted from a metaphysics of tragedy to what we might call a metaphysics of irony.

Indeed, Lukács says as much. The relationship between the problematized world and the novel is no longer the contiguity of essences, but of an imposition of unity against life:

> A totality that can be simply accepted is no longer given to the forms of art: therefore they must either narrow down and volatilise whatever has to be given from the point where they can encompass it, or else they must show polemically the impossibility of achieving their necessary object and the inner nullity of their own means. And in this case they carry the fragmentary nature of the world's structure into the world of forms.(*TN*, pp.38-39)

It is still incumbent upon aesthetic form, then, to strive for totality, but such totality can only ever be fragile or temporary. The novel, Lukács says, posits

> the fragile and incomplete nature of the world as ultimate reality by recognising, consciously and

> consistently, everything that points outside and beyond the confines of the world.(*TN*, p.72)

The novel is thus a form defined by a kind of precariousness:

> The danger by which the novel is determined is twofold: either the fragility of the world may manifest itself so crudely that it will cancel out the immanence of meaning which the form demands, or else the longing for the dissonance to be resolved, affirmed and absorbed into the work may be so great that it will lead to a premature closing of the circle of the novel's world.(*TN*, p.72)

In order to negotiate this hazard, the novel is defined, by Lukács, as a process rather than a product, it is, he says, "something in process of becoming"(*TN*, p.72). It establishes, he says,

> a fluctuating yet firm balance between becoming and being; as the idea of becoming, it becomes a state. Thus the novel, by transforming itself into a normative being of becoming, surmounts itself. 'The voyage is completed: the way begins.'(*TN*, p.73)

The novel becomes, then, the form of the establishment of what we might call an ironic totality. The image of totality is conceptual, constructed illusory, and yet necessary. "Irony," Lukács says, "is the objectivity of the novel"(*TN*, p.90). Essence is no longer changeless and static, as in the epic, but dynamic and transitory. The epic and its age witnessed, Lukács suggests, a reconciliation of being and essence, whereas the novel must establish a rapport between becoming and essence.

Having argued this historico-philosophical theory, Lukács then discusses various ways in which the novel conducts its ironic search for totality. The form of the novel, its assimilation of historical time, its development of problematic characters[17]; each of these, in different novels, becomes the vehicle of totality. Ultimately, however, Lukács wants the novel to become truly epic, comprehensively unified. Thus, he passes from considering what he calls novels of abstract idealism and Romantic

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[17]As previously mentioned, Lukács' reliance on the differences between the epic and the novel parallels a similar distinction in Auerbach and in Bakhtin, although, once again there are important differences between all three theorists. This will be discussed at greater length in connection with each of these theorists.

disillusion, to novels which recreate more extensive synthetic totalities. In Goethe, for example, Lukács sees the development of a totality which is based upon a kind of ideal of community, within which totality can exceed the merely subjective:

> Such community is not the result of people being naïvely and naturally rooted in a specific social structure, not of any natural solidarity of kinship (as in the ancient epics), nor is it a mystical experience of community ... it is achieved by personalities ... adapting and accustoming themselves to one another ... the crowning process of education, a maturity attained by struggle and effort.
> The content of such maturity is an ideal of free humanity which comprehends and affirms the structures of social life as necessary forms of human community.(*TN*, p.133)[18]

For Lukács, Goethe represents an attempt, albeit unsuccessful, to create the new epic, but, he says, reality resists such a process, remaining fragile and temporary, and the totality of community remains only, then, an ironic reflection on the problematic world.

Tolstoy, too, tries to give the social world with which his novels are concerned a sense of epic unity. Tolstoy, Lukács says, posits the unified natural world over against the problematic cultural world, trying to use the natural world as a kind of assurance that the problematic character of social life is not entirely ineluctable. Tolstoy seeks, Lukács claims, "a position half-way between nature and culture"(*TN*, p.148).

Tolstoy and Goethe, for Lukács, point towards the possibility of achieving a sense of totality within the novel which can stand as an ironic reflection, and a corrective, against the problematic world. Their capacity to do so, he is arguing, stems from their orientation towards the social life of humans, towards their historical being, which can never be timeless or unchanging, but must be a process of becoming. While these two, particularly, realized the ironic totality, the seeming unity, of the novel, Dostoevsky, Lukács seemed to be suggesting, realized the "breakthrough into a new

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[18]Lukács would continue to turn to Goethe as an aesthetic model throughout his career. In *Goethe and his Age* , trans. Robert Anchor (Budapest, 1947; London: The Merlin Press, 1968), Lukács adapted Goethe's concern with reconciliation of the individual and society into his own advocacy of realistic aesthetics.

epoch"(*TN*, p.152) at which Tolstoy, much like Lukács himself, merely hinted through abstraction, nostalgia and polemics. Dostoevsky, Lukács says, didn't write novels.[19] Rather, his engagement with the problematic world, his apprehension of the problematic, seems to get beyond mere social life towards a regained totality.

Lukács goes no further, in this essay, into how Dostoevsky may have transcended the ironic totality of the novel and retrieved the unity of essence and life for which Lukács so clearly yearns. These early works of Lukács' clearly establish his feeling that the real world of experience is ineluctably problematic. The only possible reconciliation is in artistic withdrawal, into tragedy, as in *Soul and Form*, or into irony, as in *The Theory of the Novel*. Neither aesthetic unity, however, can recapture absolute essence. The tragic can relapse into ambiguity, as Lukács said of Kierkegaard's death, and the ironic totality of the novel is doomed to collapse.

Lukács' theory of the novel, however, is seriously flawed, and it is necessary to examine these flaws. We have seen how *The Theory of the Novel* relies upon dialectical idealism. In this essay, Lukács' standard of truth has shifted from a kind of combination of Platonism and Romantic irrationalism to the logic of the dialectic. Truth, then, is progressive and the ironic objectivity of the novel is possible because, for Lukács, the novel represents the initial meeting between thesis and antithesis, before synthesis is achieved, in the dialectical progression of aesthetic form. A problem arises, however: because Lukács relies upon the logic of the dialectic, his theory requires that there is a clear distinction between his thesis and his antithesis. In *The Theory of the Novel*, this means that the ancient world - the thesis - must be unified, integrated and whole. As we have seen, Lukács certainly posits such a golden age as the basis of his analysis, but such a view seems to suggest that the ancient world lacked any social, political, or philosophical complexity, that the Greeks were merely epic characters, sure of themselves and of their destiny. As we shall see, both Auerbach and Bakhtin also perceived and proceeded from a distinction between the epic and the novel - or in Auerbach's case, the

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[19]This provides an interesting point of comparison between Lukács and Bakhtin. Both see Dostoevsky as the barometer of a profound aesthetic and epistemological shift. Lukács, however, sees this as potentially the end, or supercession, of the novel form, while Bakhtin, of course, claims that the novel form is most completely realized in Dostoevsky.

Bible, which is a kind of stylistic precursor of the novel - but neither held to such a reductive view of the ancient world, and nor, it must be added, did Hegel, who provides the fundamental philosophical basis of Lukács' essay.

Lukács' reliance on the dialectic as a ground of truth, then, leads him into a reductive analysis of the collision between the unified ancient world, and the disunified modern world - the thesis and antithesis of his analysis. His synthesis, of course, is a new epic, a modern epic which restores the (illusory) unity of the ancient world to the modern world. The novel, meanwhile, embodies the movement of the dialectic, and its transitional status, its irony, is a stage in the redevelopment, the resurrection, of the ideal.

Because Lukács is proceeding from so reductive a transposition of dialectics onto aesthetics, a question arises: does his theory of the novel maintain any credence at all? I suggest, however, that Lukács' understanding of the novel is still remarkably acute, and that his metaphysics of irony is a very suggestive idea. His problem, such as it is, is in locating his understanding of the novel. Because of his philosophical commitments to, on the one hand, idealism, and on the other, the dialectic, he places his novel in a kind of passage from the old epic to the new epic and it is this context, rather than his view of the novel itself which is ill-conceived.

Lukács's shift from tragedy to irony, then, was only a kind of displacement of his pursuit of a defining ideal which could establish a kind of essential philosophical truth. Tragedy, as we have seen, was unsustainable as a ground of truth because of its irreconcilability with the social world. Irony was similarly unsatisfying because the reconciliation between unity and the social world was only conceivable within this flawed sense of dialectical progression. The movement of Lukács' thought itself is tragic. What it needs to accomplish is confounded by its own sense of the impossibility of this accomplishment, and Lukács must then resort to Romantic gestures, or to lost worlds, efforts which are ultimately futile.

Although, at this stage of his career, Hegelian idealism, clearly evident in *The Theory of the Novel*'s historico-philosophical dialectic of aesthetic

forms, set the possibility of essence against social life, Lukács was nonetheless preoccupied by social life. In Goethe, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky Lukács searched for principles which might have given form to the social world. This attention to the social world, to the kind of historical world theorized by Vico, coupled with Lukács' contempt for the bourgeois society of his period, led him to revise his understanding of the dialectic. His philosophical orientation moved away from idealism towards materialism, from Hegel towards Marx, and from tragedy and irony towards history.

(b) Lukács, Marx and the idea of history

Turning away from tragedy and irony, Lukács', following his turn to Marx in 1918[20], began to emphasize a complex idea of history as his guiding philosophical and aesthetic principle. The outstanding achievement of this period, of course, is *History and Class Consciousness*, arguably Lukács' most enduring intellectual contribution.

The impact of this collection of essays on the intellectual history of Marxism cannot easily be overstated.[21] Widely influential and the source of much intellectual and political controversy, it warrants, even now, greater attention than the present study allows. In the context of this study, the aspect of *History and Class Consciousness* which is most important is the way in which Lukács turned to history to overcome the dichotomy between life and art which had characterized his earlier work.

Previously, Lukács' disaffection with the social world had generated a series of antitheses between social life and aesthetic ideals such as "soul" and "form." The consequence of these antitheses was the Romantic aestheticism, the tragic and ironic metaphysics which consecrated this radical separation. The turn to history was a turn away from Romantic aestheticism towards greater engagement with the social world. As Löwy has noted:

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[20]Lukács joined the Hungarian Communist Party in December 1918. This period of Lukács' development is comprehensively discussed in Kadarkay, *Georg Lukács*, p.193f.; Löwy, *From Romanticism to Bolshevism*, Chapter III "Lukács' Leftist Period (1919-21); Márkus, "Life and the Soul".

[21]See Löwy, *From Romanticism to Bolshevism*, pp.168-169.

> In *The Theory of the Novel*, with its tragic view of the world, Lukács had spoken of 'the unbridgeable chasm between the reality that is and the ideal that should be'. But in *History and Class Consciousness*, this inflexible opposition ... is finally abolished ...[22]

While he held to this opposition between form and life, Lukács' ideas of thought and action, of theory and practice, were incommensurable, and the work of art, trying to realize a philosophical ideal, was therefore divorced from the social world.[23] In his philosophical interpretation of Marx, Lukács began to see how these seeming opposites might be reconciled. Indeed, for Lukács, dialectical method is explicitly concerned with this possibility:

> Marx clearly defined the conditions in which a relation between theory and practice becomes possible. "It is not enough that thought should seek to realise itself; reality must also strive towards thought." Or, as he expresses it in an earlier work: "It will then be realised that the world has long since possessed something in the form of a dream which it need only take possession of consciously in order to possess it in reality." Only when consciousness stands in such a relation to reality can theory and practice be united.[24]

Lukács is, then, no longer concerned to escape the social world, but rather to theorize it, to understand it, in his own terms, in totality. Still concerned with the problematic structure of social life, he turns to historical consciousness as the basis for this project. In doing so, two important features of Lukács' thought are made clear. The first is his continued concern specifically with the problems of the social world, evincing his affinity with the traditions of life-philosophy and the human sciences. He makes clear that sheer empiricism and procedures which claim scientific objectivity are inadequate methods for apprehending the social world:

> The blinkered empiricist will of course deny that facts can only become facts within the framework of a

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[22]Löwy, *From Romanticism to Bloshevism*, p.171.
[23]See Márkus, "Life and the Soul", pp. 9-10.
[24]Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p.2. Hereafter, this volume will be referred to as *HCC*, and all references will be given in the text.

> system - which will vary with the knowledge desired. He believes that every piece of data from economic life, every statistic, every raw event already constitutes an important fact. In doing so he forgets that however simple an enumeration of 'facts' may be, however lacking in commentary, it already implies an 'interpretation'.(*HCC*, p.5)

The shortcoming of this method of apprehending the social world is, according to Lukács', "its failure to see and take account of the *historical character* of the facts on which it is based", and, thus, it "uncritically accepts the nature of the object as it is given and the laws of that society as the unalterable foundation of 'science'"(*HCC*, p.6).

Against this method, Lukács posits the dialectical method:

> In order to progress from these 'facts' to facts in the true meaning of the word it is necessary to perceive their historical conditioning as such and to abandon the point of view that would see them as immediately given: they must themselves be subjected to a historical and dialectical examination.(*HCC*, p.7)

This sense of the historical world gives rise to what Lukács calls "totality." Phenomena of experience must be understood as part of a historical structure in order to be understood completely:

> Only in this context which sees the isolated facts of social life as aspects of the historical process and integrates them in a *totality*, can knowledge of the facts hope to become knowledge of *reality*. This knowledge starts from the simple (and to the capitalist world), pure, immediate, natural determinants described above. It progresses from them to the knowledge of the concrete totality, i.e. to the conceptual reproduction of reality. This concrete totality is by no means an unmediated datum for thought. 'The concrete is concrete,' Marx says, 'because it is a synthesis of many particular determinants, i.e. a unity of diverse elements.'(*HCC*, pp.8-9)

Totality, then, is the sum of social forces which constitute phenomena of social life, and Lukács' concern with the social world thus, as Martin Jay

has noted, underlines his affinities with Vico's idea of history,[25] a point borne out both directly and indirectly in *History and Class Consciousness*. Lukács not only refers, via Marx, to Vico himself, but also claims that "history is precisely *the history of* ... (social) *institutions*, of the changes they undergo *as* institutions which bring men together in societies"(*HCC*, p.48)

The second important feature of Lukács' theory of history is attendant upon the first. As we have seen, Lukács is persistently concerned specifically with problems of the social world, evincing his position within the tradition of the human sciences. Previously, however, his response to the problematic nature of the social world was one of withdrawal or transcendence. In *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács, committed now to Marxism, is compelled to engage in a more direct critique.

His critique of the social world derives from his view that bourgeois thought is incapable of coming to terms with the problematic social world. As we have seen, empirical scientific procedures, according to Lukács, fail to comprehend the historical nature of social life. Similarly, metaphysically idealist approaches remain, Lukács says, purely contemplative and so fail to connect with the real world. This is particularly the case with Kant, who, according to Lukács, cannot overcome the antinomy of being unable to reconcile a critique of reason with a demand or desire for a universal system of reason. Kant's distrust of experience means that his categories of knowledge are necessarily divorced from experience. Lukács writes:

> But the moment that the object is seen as part of a concrete totality, the moment that it becomes clear that alongside the formal, delimiting concept of existence acknowledged by this pure contemplation other gradations of reality are possible and necessary to thought (being [*Dasein*], existence [*Existenz*], reality [*Realität*], etc. in Hegel), Kant's proof collapses: it survives only as the demarcation line of purely formal thought.(*HCC*, p.127)

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[25]Martin Jay , *Marxism and Totality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), pp.108-109.

This pure formalism, Lukács says, is the shortcoming of Hegel as well. While greatly indebted to Hegel, Lukács' turn away from idealism required a revision of his position with regard to Hegel:

> Hegel's philosophy is driven inexorably into the arms of mythology. Having failed to discover the identical subject-object in history it was forced to go out beyond history and, there, to establish the empire of reason which has discovered itself.(*HCC*, pp.146-147)

Against these shortcomings, Lukács argues that Marx offers a truly critical philosophy which can "puncture the social illusion"(*HCC*, p.5) and which holds the key to getting beyond the problems of historical life from within. "[T]he central problem", Lukács reminds us, "is *to change reality*"(*HCC*, p.3).

Lukács premises his critique upon the conviction that the social structure produced by capitalism encouraged non-dialectical, empiricist thinking. He argues that the development of the bourgeoisie makes possible the "recognition that society is reality"(*HCC*, p.19). The problem, however, is that, under capitalism, forms of social life, and particularly of economic life, become *reified*. That is, the social and historical nature of phenomena of experience is obfuscated and they appear as natural or given. Conceived of in such a manner, experience then reinforces an empirical objectivist approach to the apprehension of the social world. Lukács bases his argument on his analysis of commodity-relations, the dominant mode of economic exchange in capitalist economics. He argues that "the structure of commodity relations can be made to yield a model of all the objective forms of bourgeois society together with all the subjective forms corresponding to them"(*HCC*, p.83). In other words, Lukács is arguing that in bourgeois society, seemingly objective, natural forms of social reality and an empirical approach to them are encouraged. This, he goes on to argue, is due to the essence of commodity-structure:

> Its basis is that a relation between people takes on the character of a thing and thus acquires a 'phantom objectivity', an autonomy that seems so strictly rational and all-embracing as to conceal every trace of its fundamental nature: the relation between people.(*HCC*, p.83)

This is what Lukács calls the phenomenon of reification and this is the point with which Lukács asserts Marxism as a genuinely philosophical advance over classical epistemology. The phenomena of reification, which have a materialist basis, become features of human consciousness. Marx's critical philosophy, on the other hand,

> implies above all historical criticism. It dissolves the rigid, unhistorical, natural appearance of social institutions; it reveals their historical origins and shows therefore that they are subject to history in every respect including historical decline. Consequently history does not merely unfold *within* the terrain mapped out by these institutions. It does not resolve itself into the evolution of *contents*, of men and situations, etc, while the *principles* of society remain eternally valid.(*HCC*, p.47)

Lukács' turn to history, then, is a return to experience as the basis of social critique. By breaking away from the objectivistic forms of bourgeois thought, Lukács argues, it becomes possible to break down the classical dichotomy between subject and object, and to understand them as dialectically dependent upon one another. Thus, he goes on, we are able to understand *"the problem of the present as a historical problem"*(*HCC*, p.157).

Once the present is understood as historical, social structure can be understood as a totality, as a convergence of historical forces. From this point, Lukács advances his theory of class consciousness as a sense of this dialectic materialism. He argues that once the proletariat achieves dialectical class consciousness, it will marry its objective place in the totality of bourgeois society to a consciousness of the totality, and thus effect, in practice, a radical critique of bourgeois society. Lukács in effect substitutes the materialism of the proletariat for the idealism of Hegel's Spirit. Such a move sees the constructed nature of social life become reconciled to a dynamic, reformative principle of social action, which is the very point of Lukács' critique.

Thus, Lukács now seems to have found what we might call a productive critique of social life. Through the apprehension of the historical, social nature of human reality, Lukács comes to the idea that *"history is the history of the unceasing overthrow of the objective forms that shape the*

life of man", and argues that this conviction must remain in place against tendencies in thought which cause "man to become frozen in a fixed objectivity"(*HCC*, p.186). This juxtaposition of consciousness and history is Lukács' central ambition:

> This throws an entirely new light on the problem of reality. If, in Hegel's terms, Becoming now appears as the truth of Being, and process as the truth about things, then this means that the *developing tendencies of history constitute a higher reality than the empirical 'facts'* ... (The) image of a frozen reality ... becomes meaningless when this reality is dissolved into the process of which man is the driving force.(*HCC*, p.181)[26]

If we set aside the specific political intervention of *History and Class Consciousness*, we can see the shape of Lukács' critique in the following terms. His first premise is the problematic, oppressive nature of the social world. His earlier works, motivated by this conviction, advocate a kind of aesthetic withdrawal. But between *The Theory of the Novel* and *History and Class Consciousness* we can see that Lukács moved beyond Romantic aestheticism by developing a critical methodology which was specifically concerned with the social world. This is his second premise; the social world requires intellectual procedures which do not seek scientific objectivism, and which must find their resolution within the social world. There is a double edge to this development: on the one hand, Lukács remains committed to a critique of the social world; on the other, he remains committed to the primary reality of the social world. His sense of historical consciousness implied that consciousness must always be aware of its own historical conditioning, conditioning which was itself subject to historical development. Like his earlier tragic idealism - destined never quite to realize itself - Lukács' turn to history presupposed a rigorous and ongoing critique of social life, including one's own understanding thereof.

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[26]This characterization of Being as Becoming - which occurs also in *The Theory of the Novel* - betrays Lukács' Hegelianism most pointedly. Hegel, for example, developing Heraclitus' notion of flux, writes: "This universal principle is better characterized as Becoming, the truth of Being; since everything is and is not". See G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on The History of Philosophy, Volume I*, trans. E.S. Haldane (London: Routledge, 1955), p.283.

It is this critical dimension of Lukács' thought which establishes a continuous thread throughout his various philosophical and political sea-changes. On this basis, Markus writes that

> Lukács' conversion to Marxism in 1918 was not a break, an irrational hiatus in the evolution of his ideas, but an attempt to find both a theoretical answer and a practical solution to the question (of human culture) that had, in the final analysis, fuelled the whole of his early development.[27]

And just as his critical theory turned towards human praxis, his aesthetic theory turned towards realism as the literary form which embodied the idea of historical totality which stood both as critique and as resolution of the problematic world of experience.[28] From the early 1930s to 1957, Lukács was almost exclusively concerned with literary theory and criticism, and, while his work of this period is perhaps less noteworthy than his earlier

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[27]Markus, "Life and the Soul", p.21.

[28]This analysis overlooks the complexities of Lukács' intellectual and political life following the appearance of *History and Class Consciousness*. Löwy provides a detailed theoretical analysis of the events surrounding Lukács during this period (pp.189 ff.). Kadarkay gives a more thorough historical account (Chapter 12). Broadly, the relentlessly critical approach, motivated by philosophical idealism, of *History and Class Consciousness* collided with real political necessity, and was later abandoned by Lukács. Lichtheim's observations on Lukács' conflict with other party intellectuals are extremely helpful. He writes: "As Lukács ... saw the matter, Marxism was indeed ... the inheritor of classical German philosophy." This confounded Engels' codification of Marx which had been taken up by Lenin and Plekhanov as the cornerstone of Soviet Marxism. More philosophically sophisticated, Lukács' interpretation of Marx precluded the possibility of exhaustive knowledge of reality, while the Party depended upon just such a possibility (see Lichtheim, *Lukács*, pp.58-59). Lichtheim continues: "In effecting this return to the (Hegelian) position of the early Marx, Lukács departed from orthodoxy and he compounded the offence by refusing to sanction the 'materialist' view of cognition as a mirror-image of an external world"(p.65). Generally, the radical edge of Lukács' critical philosophy was gradually dulled, and the potential for resolution of historical conflict moved from an abstract ideal of History to a concrete political reality, the Party. Nonetheless, even if Lukács, for various reasons, revised his position as to the possibility of resolving the problematic nature of the social world, *History and Class Consciousness* established an idea which sustained Lukács' subsequent work in literary theory. Fredric Jameson argues that the implication of *History and Class Consciousness* for literary theory is that it introduced a critique which would undermine the seemingly natural, reified surface of the social world by dissolving it into "a coexistence of various and conflicting historical tendencies, a translation of immobile objects into acts and potential acts and into the consequences of acts. Indeed," he continues, "we are tempted to claim that for the Lukács of *History and Class Consciousness* the ultimate resolution of the Kantian dilemma is to be found not in the nineteenth-century philosophical systems ... but rather in the nineteenth-century *novel*"; see *Marxism and Form*, p.189. This would suggest a further continuity between the pre-Marxist Lukács and the later Lukács insofar as the resolution of the problematic social world is once again sought in literature.

writings, it is yet possible to trace the critical dimension of his thought within his theory of realism.

(c) Lukács and realism

As discussed above, Lukács work on realism was largely defensive, and, in many ways, evinced a greater degree of partisan commitment than intellectual rigour. His criticism of modern literature, for example, doesn't weather close critical scrutiny. It is clear that Lukács not only disliked modern literature, but didn't understand it. His contemptuous characterization of T.S. Eliot as "[t]oday's spokesman for decadence"[29] betrays, to say the least, a reductive understanding of modern poetry. If, however, we set aside Lukács' reactionary stance towards modern literature and attend closely to his preference for realism, it is possible to see the critical aspect of his earlier work manifested in his literary theory and criticism of this period.

In "Art and Objective Truth" Lukács discusses what he calls the "contradictory basis" of the apprehension of the external world. On the one hand, he opens the essay with the following claim:

> The basis for any correct cognition of reality, whether of nature or society, is the recognition of the objectivity of the external world, that is, its existence independent of human consciousness. Any apprehension of the external world is nothing more than a reflection in consciousness of the world that exists independently of consciousness. This basic fact of the relationship of consciousness to being also serves, of course, for the artistic reflection of reality.(*W & C*, p.25)

On the other hand, he is concerned throughout this essay to make clear that this "objectivity of the external world is no inert, rigid objectivity fatalistically determining human activity ... it stands in the most indissoluble interaction with practice"(*W & C*, p.29). He argues that non-

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[29]Georg Lukács, "Healthy or Sick Art" in *Writer & Critic* , p.109. The essays collected in this volume originally appeared, according to Lukács' 1965 preface, in Moscow and Budapest during the 1930's and 1940's. Further references to this essay will be given in the text and indicated by the abbreviation *W & C*.

dialectical epistemology fails to reconcile the objective world with an apprehension of the external world which does not simplify is dynamic nature.

The dialectical method, he argues, manages to come to terms with this contradiction, and he goes on to posit an equivalence between dialectical epistemology and literary realism:

> The artistic reflection of reality rests on the same contradiction as any other reflection of reality. What is specific to it is that it pursues another resolution of these contradictions than science.(*W & C*, p.34)

The equivalence between literary realism and the dialectical method is that neither claims an objective *apprehension* of the objective world. According to Lukács, the fact that the world of the literary work is fictional - "every significant work of art creates its 'own world'"(*W & C*, p.35) - constitutes its capacity to represent reality because the reader, by accepting the fiction of the work, "surrenders ... to the general effect of the work"(*W & C*, pp.36-37). Curiously, Lukács suggests that the *fiction* of the work, the fact that it does not really correspond to reality, is an illusion, reversing the critical tendency to characterise the verisimilitude of the work as the illusion. This illusion, he says, is overcome by "the special character, the peculiar kind of reflection of reality there is in art"(*W & C*, p.36). This "peculiar kind" of reflection, involves, then, contradiction, and relies upon a dialectical epistemology which understands reality as, at once, objective, and nonetheless subject to an ongoing dynamic process. "The self-containment of a work of art", Lukács says, "is therefore the reflection of the process of life in motion and in concrete dynamic context"(*W & C*, p.37).

Clearly this formulation is problematic. Lukács seems to be arguing that realism works on the following principles: firstly, the work *seems* to be fictitious, but this non-correspondence with reality is an illusion; then, because it is fictitious, readers are required, and able, to immerse themselves in and to experience the world of the work of art; following this immersion, the "truth" of literature emerges because readers, experiencing the dialectical process within literature, cross-refer this aesthetic experience to their own experience of the social world, and,

because the literary experience is more concentrated, more self-contained, readers then appreciate their own dialectical reality more acutely; in the aesthetic world, readers can see the real world beyond their own experience of it.

Obviously, these are highly contentious suggestions. That literature is dialectical and so is life and that therefore art reflects life is a tenuous suggestion at best, and it is claims like this which have done so much to damage Lukács' reputation as a literary theorist. But the flaws in his theory of realism, once again, can lead us back to what is valuable in his theory. His theory of realism revives many of the features of his earlier critical thought, and certainly makes many of his earlier errors. He begins by setting himself against procedures which accept the objective world as simply given, and, once again, turns to literature as the possibility of getting beyond this kind of epistemology. As Rodney Livingstone points out:

> It is ... now art and specifically realist art whose function it is to de-reify reality ... Lukács's view of realism ... is then a form of essentialism.[30]

While previously Lukács had sought "essence" in tragedy, he now finds it in the dialectical representation of reality in literature, representation which recreates the historical totality of reality. But the isomorphism between dialectical epistemology and realism in literature is hastily and sketchily outlined. His theory once again is caught between the clarity of his perception of philosophical problems and his need to solve these problems. And, once again, the solution is flawed; his location of the novel in a philosophical progression from unity to unity, as we have seen, was flawed and, here, his account of realism as the portal to dialectical philosophy is fraught with problems.

But the claims Lukács' makes for realism do not necessarily invalidate his view of realism. There is a tension between Lukács' understanding of what realism *is*, and what it *does*. As Livingstone points out, Lukács wants to make realism an essence, the philosophical standard of truth. But

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[30]Rodney Livingstone, "Introduction" in Georg Lukács, *Essays on Realism*, ed. Rodney Livingstone, trans. David Fernbach (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1981), pp.11-12. This volume is also a collection of Lukács' essays dating from 1931-1940.

against essentialism, there is Lukács' historicism. For Lukács, realism is both essentially historical, insofar as it recreates historical materialism, and historicized, insofar as representation is not timeless but bound to a particular period. These two aspects of realism would seem contradictory. essentialism being changeless and historicity being concerned specifically with change. But Lukács' theory of realism overcomes this seeming contradiction by characterizing essence as a philosophical method or form - dialectical materialism - and historicizing the material, or content, of realism.

Once again, Lukács' undoes the critical aspect of his literary theory by then making extravagant claims for his discovery. This tension between the essential and the particular, which might have been understood as grounds for limiting or at least moderating the claims made for realism, becomes the means whereby Lukács makes his most ambitious claims for realism. This tension, he suggests, generates the illusion of non-correspondence between the text and the world, which makes possible the readers' immersion in the text, and this immersion accounts for the verisimilitude of a text. Once again Lukács has turned to art as the reconciliation of philosophical problems, a faith in art which is a kind of residual of the aestheticism which characterized his earlier work. Readers experience, Lukács argues, both the particulars of the world of a literary work and something essential to their own historical experience, its dialectical nature. Thus, he suggests, readers become philosophically enriched because the limits of experience are transcended when readers are immersed in seemingly illusory experiences, but then, through this transposition, they are made aware of the fundamental elements, the essence of experience itself. Once again, Lukács' critical acuity is tainted by his relentless idealism.

But elements of Lukács' apprehension of realism are still insightful. His sense of the tension between the essential and the particular motivates Lukács' invective against naturalism. In "Narrate or Describe ?", Lukács unfavourably compares Zola with Tolstoy. Zola's error, he argues, is to try to describe, to try to provide exhaustive detail, as if he were photographically recording certain data. Tolstoy, on the other hand, narrates his material as an event which takes its place in a historical

process outside of which it has no reality.[31] While Lukács admires Zola's talent, he suggests that his method, which overlooks the social context in which events must be understood, is fundamentally mistaken. Zola seems to claim a kind of scientific objectivity in representation which Lukács, as a historicist and a former student of *lebensphilosophie*, considers to be unavailable. In a sense, Zola's essentialism is substantial - based on a kind of scientific reduction to basic elements - while Lukács' is methodological - based on the conceptual approach to the data.

This argument of Lukács' is reaffirmed in *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* where Lukács challenges literary modernism. Lukács posits a distinction between two

> opposed views of the world - dynamic and developmental on the one hand, static and sensational on the other ...[32]

Again, Lukács is commited to realism on the basis of its apprehension of the world as dynamic. He cites Aristotle's definition of humans as *zoon politikon* - social beings - to assert that human reality is socio-historical. Modernism, like expressionism and naturalism before it, fails to come to terms with this essential structure of human reality, seeking instead a kind of essential substance of the individual. Lukács' Aristotelianism complements his earlier preference for narration over description, in which Aristotle's poetics are clearly echoed.

While, again, Lukács' arguments are somewhat vitiated by his poor understanding of modern literature[33] his theory of realism still countenances a problematic apprehension of the world. Maintaining his emphasis on the specifically social and historical nature of human reality, Lukács argues that literary representation does not merely correspond to reality, but methodologically coincides with what Lukács considers to be a philosophically accurate apprehension of reality. Indeed, the complexity of

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[31]See *W & C*, pp.110-111.

[32]Georg Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, p.19.

[33]Adorno's critique of Lukács, and particularly of this book, seem to me the most comprehensive review of Lukács' shortcomings in this respect. Adorno contests Lukács' claim that all modern art is decadent and anti-historical. Adorno goes on to suggest that Lukács' work of this period is almost wilfully bad, as if he were registering a kind of hidden protest against the political environment in which he worked; see Theodor W. Adorno, "Extorted Reconciliation" in *Notes to Literature, Vol. I.*

realism acts as a kind of corrective for the apprehension of reality. Because, in realism, reality is at once objective and historicized, the aesthetic experience of this tension leads, Lukács suggests, to a *real* apprehension of this tension which leads, in turn, to a dialectical epistemology as the only means of turning this tension into a balance.

But these shortcomings notwithstanding, we can see that Lukács' theory of realism is predicated upon an important conviction: the real social world cannot simply be accepted as it is; it is necessary philosophically to critique the social world. Lukács is critical insofar as this insight is concerned but his need to "solve" the problematic social world - the sources of which are varied and complex - lead his critical faculty astray, encourage him to believe that certain philosophical and, indeed, political doctrines have achieved a vantage point which is beyond critique, which is, we might say, "the way it is."

But the distinction between the static and dynamic apprehensions of the social world is still a useful one. In *The Historical Novel*, this was precisely how Lukács distinguished between eighteenth- and nineteenth-century realistic novels:

> even the great realistic novel of the eighteenth century, which in its portrayal of contemporary morals and psychology, accomplished a revolutionary breakthrough to reality for world literature is not concerned to show its characters as belonging to any concrete time. The contemporary world is portrayed with unusual plasticity and truth-to-life, but is accepted naïvely *as something given*: whence and how it has developed have not yet become problems for the writer.[34]

Here, Lukács is arguing for literary representation which grasps and incorporates the historicity of human reality, and, more specifically, the materialist theory of history which he has developed. Once again, he relies upon Hegel to assert the historical character of the life of individuals, but criticizes Hegel's idealism. Whereas Hegel characterized certain key historical figures as manifestations of the historical spirit, which figures

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[34]Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (Moscow, 1937; London: Merlin Press, 1962), p.19, emph. mine. Further references to *The Historical Novel* (hereafter *HN*) will be included in the text.

then determine the historical development of society, Lukács argues that historical figures develop out of the historical materiality of their epoch. This is the historicism which he finds and approves of in the nineteenth-century novel. Citing Balzac, he writes of Sir Walter Scott in the following terms:

> Scott's novels, he said, marched towards the great heroes in the same way as history itself had done when it required their appearance. The reader, therefore, experiences the historical genesis of the important historical figures, and it is the writer's task from then on to let their actions make them appear the real representatives of these historical crises.
> Scott thus lets his important figures grow out of the being of the age, he never explains the age from the position of its great representatives, as do the Romantic hero-worshippers. Hence they can never be central figures of the action.(*HN*, p.39)

This, Lukács argues, is the acievement of Balzac, James Fenimore Cooper, and, particularly, Tolstoy: their novels capture a broad sense of the historical materialism of social life. In *War and Peace*, Lukács claims:

> The depiction of popular life is broader, more colourful, richer in characters. The emphasis on popular life as the real basis of historical happenings is more conscious.(*HN*, p.86)

Lukács' emphasis on realistic representation, and particularly on historical representation, is a continuation of his philosophical propositions about the kind of existence, of Being-in-the-world, which humans experience, and a development in his aesthetic search for resolution of the problems of this existence.

(d) Rethinking Lukács

Lukács' aesthetic theories can be seen now as contributing to the present study in three essential ways. The first is his sense of the social and historical nature of human existence. Furthermore, he understands this social world as problematic. The manner in which Lukács theorizes this problematic develops throughout his career. He begins with a rejection of the world of experience, an aesthetic withdrawal into tragedy, and then

begins to articulate an idealistic reconciliation with it. These responses to the problematic social world inform his early writings in *Soul and Form* and *The Theory of the Novel*. Finally, Lukács adopts Hegelian Marxist epistemology in an effort comprehensively to apprehend the nature of the social world.

This last point emphasizes the second important feature of Lukács' contribution to this study. Consistent both with his early introduction to Diltheyan human sciences and his later materialism, Lukács maintains that human reality, being social and historical, requires discrete theoretical practices in order to apprehend it. As it is not merely given, its comprehensive apprehension can only be achieved through intellectual methods which incorporate a sense of its historical and social conditioning. This idea is evident particularly in Lukács' later work in dialectical materialism, although in *The Theory of the Novel*, Lukács' efforts to synthesize an approach to the social world is already evident.

Thirdly, throughout his career, Lukács turned to aesthetic theory as a critique of the problems of the social world. Initially, as we have seen, Lukács counterposed art and life. He begins by seeking refuge in art but in his later works turns to art not as an escape from the problems of the social world but rather as the expression of the materialist philosophy which represents the possibility of reconciliation with the social world. In *The Theory of the Novel*, Lukács' reliance on the irony of the novel begins his process of reconciliation with the social world. By *The Historical Novel*, he has come to view the realistic novel of the nineteenth-century as the very manifestation of a historical materialist approach to society.

We can see, then, that Lukács' amalgamation of the human sciences, dialectical philosophical approaches, historical materialism, and realistic aesthetics begins, but only begins, to constitute a profound challenge to anti-realistic aesthetics. The renunciation of realism in the name of critical theory, as we have seen in Part I, relies upon a characterization of realism which presupposes a non-problematic approach to human reality. Such an approach would exhibit little anxiety towards its own procedures and rest securely upon its own standards of objectivity. For Lukács, however, such presuppositions are the very target of his critical practice. Rather, he

proceeds from a critical stance towards social reality, developing his aesthetic theory as a vehicle for critique.

But Lukács' critical theory is fraught with Lukács' own conflicting impulses. On the one hand, his sense of the problematic social world generates his historical consciousness which leads him philosophically to abandon a notion of essential being, replacing it with the more fluid, dynamic concept of becoming. On the other hand, Lukács is unwilling to embrace the problematic social world. His early retreats into tragedy and his lamentation over the passing of a (misconceived) golden age of spiritual wealth make clear that he is unwilling to accept the problematic social world and seeks, somehow, to resolve it. In his Marxist period he achieves this resolution by resorting not to substantial essentialism but to methodological essentialism. While the social world may be problematic, dynamic, historical, there is an approach which is universally appropriate. That is, of course, dialectical materialism, in which Lukács locates the possibility of, at once, admitting the historical quality of reality and going beyond it.

Lukács', then, only explores the possibilities of realistic representation in a limited fashion. His apprehension of the social world - the background of realism - is problematic, complex and critical, but, in many ways, his response to the problematic world is simple and uncritical. We have seen how, throughout his career, some of Lukács' critical premises were questionable. Such fundamental flaws certainly could not furnish him with the conceptual tools for achieving the essential philosophical position for which he longed. In his later phases, those most directly concerned with realism, Lukács' commitment to dialectical materialism limits realism to an expression of the historical materialism of the world of the text, tying it to his claim that dialectical materialism is philosophically and politically unassailable. While he takes us beyond a simple, uncritical apprehension of the social world, his faith in the inexorable dialectical movement of history admits of no critique of itself. In terms of the present study, then, Lukács represents only an initial stage in the reassertion of the critical possibilities of a theory of realistic representation. In the first part of this study I argued that anti-realism rested upon a reductive account of realism, upon constructing realism as a bastion of theoretical errors, the correction of which is the task of critical

theory. The challenge to such a view represented by Lukács is, in a sense, an inversion of the same error. While Lukács appreciates realism far more critically, his invective against other forms and genres is clearly reductive, and instead of constructing realism as an error, he makes of it a philosophical ideal and a paramount artistic achievement, which he tries to establish as the corrective of all other philosophical and literary errors.

But Lukács' critical approach to realism is helpful insofar as it is only concerned with the complexities of realism. As we have seen, many of Lukács shortcomings derive from the same source as his strengths. His search for truth inspired his most critical moments in which he set himself against static, moribund habits of thought; his sense of the irony of the novel, his critique of the social world, his appreciation of the conceptual resources of the realistic novel. But his need successfully to conclude his search led him into his own dogma. We can say, then, that his tragedy is philosophical, because his philosophical strengths and weaknesses coincide. It is also possible to say that his philosophy is tragic, not because he is surrounded by a hostile philosophical cosmos, but because his philosophical development, which, as he have seen, begins with a commitment to the tragic, is motivated by this sense of inherent tension, of irreconcilable paradox. To try to overcome this paradox, Lukács' theories move from one failed god to another, his need always to commit himself philosophically at odds with his keen apprehension of the indeterminacies of existence.

Lukács' contribution to this study, then, is a qualified one. On the one hand, Lukács' commitment to realism, or, rather, the understanding of realism which informs his political and aesthetic commitment, shows how realism can be considered philosophically productive, how it can be considered within a critical framework. In this chapter we have seen how Lukács' work, from his earliest writings, is based upon philosophically critical foundations, which lead in various ways to flawed conclusions. I have tried to show how his theory of realism, while in many ways the product of his least reflective period, emerges from his critical background as a critical theory. On the other hand, however, to so appreciate Lukács' contribution requires a kind of excision of his more ambitious philosophical aspirations, his efforts to get beyond criticism, beyond history. While many of these imperatives in Lukács' work derived from

his own historical and political milieu, it is fair to say that they were also implicit in his essential philosophical position. Lukács asked, as it were, the right questions; it is in the questions he asked, rather than the answers he supplied, that his enduring theoretical contribution lies.

In the following chapter we shall be concerned with another theorist of realism whose contributions, while perhaps less well-known than those of Lukács, are more enduring. For Erich Auerbach, as for Lukács, history became an important theoretical field. But unlike Lukács, whose rigid commitment to dialectical thinking limited his critical insights, Auerbach conceived of history as more amorphous, more relativistic, and this view of history figures prominently in his literary theory, the cornerstone of which is, of course, his great study of realism.

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Erich Auerbach and the world of nations

> ... the world, which seems
> To lie before us like a land of dreams,
> So various, so beautiful, so new,
> Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
> Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
> And we are here as on a darkling plain
> Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
> Where ignorant armies clash by night.
>
> - Matthew Arnold

Erich Auerbach's anxious survey of the history of Western literature - his major work *Mimesis* - was, perhaps, a kind of gesture against what he saw as its imminent demise. Written during the Second World War while Auerbach was in exile in Turkey, and without recourse to proper scholastic resources, *Mimesis*, like the works of the early Lukács, is, at least in part, a response to Auerbach's keen sense of cultural and historical crisis, his own "struggle and flight" seeming to parallel the siege under which his whole cultural environment was suffering.

But while *Mimesis* may be understood as a reaction to specific circumstances, it is certainly not reactionary, in the ordinary sense, and its theoretical resonance cannot be limited to the circumstances of its genesis. Auerbach's focus upon "the interpretation of reality through literary representation"[1] is not so much a monument to realism (or to its memory) as a detailed exploration of the complicated relationship between literature and reality, the philosophical richness of each, and the ways in which literature has addressed these complexities. It is the loss of this complexity which Auerbach fears, and his study, in arguing for realism as a poignant focus for the study of this complexity, survives its specific milieu. In this chapter, I shall try to show how Auerbach's attention to realism rests upon complicated and fundamentally *critical* aesthetic and epistemological premises and how his work contributes to the present

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[1]Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Berne, 1946; Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953), p.554. Hereafter, all references to *Mimesis* will be incorporated into the text.

argument that such a view of realism contributes much to a critical approach to literature and to literary theory.

Auerbach's approach, like that of the Lukács of *History and Class Consciousness*, develops from a philosophical approach to history. Indeed, Auerbach advances his theories through his own literary historiography. But Auerbach's approach to history is certainly not naively empirical or positivistic. Fredric Jameson, for example, discussing the redefinition of literary history under the influence of contemporary critical theory suggests that the task of this revised kind of literary history

> is at one with that proposed by Louis Althusser for historiography in general: not to elaborate some achieved and lifelike simulacrum of its supposed object, but rather to "produce" the latter's "concept." This is indeed what the greatest modern or modernizing literary histories - such as Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* - have sought to do in their critical practice, if not in their theory.[2]

It is interesting that Jameson explicitly associates Auerbach with the kind of critical consciousness which has contributed to anti-representational aesthetics. His suggestion that this critical aspect of *Mimesis* is more a matter of its practice than its theory implies that it is almost unaware of its own critical possibilities. I suggest, on the contrary, that not only is Auerbach's critical practice based upon a profoundly critical approach, but that such an approach is implicit in his very theoretical underpinnings. The enduring implications of Auerbach's contribution to literary theory and history are certainly not, as Jameson seems to imply, accidental.

Auerbach's aesthetics display some remarkable similarities to those of both Lukács and, as I shall discuss below, Mikhail Bakhtin. These are not so explicit that common sources - except perhaps a general neo-Kantian origin - can be traced, nor do they seem to have been aware of one another to any significant degree.[3] Rather, the similarities lie in their common

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[2]Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, p.12.

[3]That Lukács and Auerbach were unaware of Bakhtin's work may be inferred from the circumstances of Bakhtin's working life, but Lukács' wide currency would have been likely to have brought his work to the attention of Auerbach, though a reciprocal exchange would have been less likely. These, however, are speculations; I have come across no evidence in their works to support or refute them. Bakhtin's awareness of Lukács, however, is documented, but these will be discussed in the notes to the following chapter.

attention to the aesthetics of realistic representation, and in that each proceeds from a distinction between classical epic narrative and the aesthetics of the novel. As we have seen, Lukács' lament for the loss of the spiritual unity represented by the epic is problematic, and his understanding of the classical world is questionable. On the other hand, Auerbach and Bakhtin both tend to embrace the novel not as a possibility of regaining the sort of epic unity for which Lukács longs - indeed, neither is so reductive in his account of the epic/novel contrast as Lukács - but as the expression of a more sophisticated aesthetic which is more appropriate to the social and historical world.

It is important to understand how Auerbach arrives at his view of the novel. Strictly speaking, of course, he doesn't actually draw a distinction between epic and novel, but between the epic and the Bible, which he sees as the progenitor of the stylistic line which leads to the novel. But his preference, on the basis of mimesis or realism, for the stylistic line which incorporates the Bible, Dante and the nineteenth-century novel, derives from his sense of the complexities and relativities of history. Realism, he suggests, is useful precisely because it presupposes such a sense of history, and because it sets itself against empirical or positivistic approaches which reduce or fail to appreciate these complexities. On this basis, we can say that Auerbach meets the criteria of the critical with which we have been concerned, because his apprehension of the historical world, the reality of literary realism, is not content with simply the way reality is. Rather, he is concerned with how reality comes to be the way it is, a question to which, as we shall see, he hopes not to find a final answer.

Auerbach's commitment to historical relativism sustains the encyclopaedic consideration of the representation of reality in *Mimesis*, creating a kind of tension between his commitment to realistic representation and his own tendency to relativize realistic representation as an aesthetic principle. As I have indicated, my method in these chapters is to examine the critical background to various theories of realism, to determine how these theories were arrived at. Auerbach's attention to realism, as I have been suggesting, is incorporated into his general approach to the historical world, and the impetus for Auerbach's sense of history derives from his lifelong association with the thought of Giambattista Vico, whose theory of history constituted an important

contribution to the understanding of history as a specifically human problem.

(a) Vico's development of the study of history

Auerbach's intellectual relationship with Vico has been commented on at some length,[4] and, more pointedly, given great weight by Auerbach himself.[5] Auerbach wrote several major essays on Vico, reviewed works on Vico, including Bergin and Fisch's well-known English translation of *The New Science*, and himself translated both Vico's *The New Science* and Benedetto Croce's study of Vico into German. The influence suggested by this relationship warrants attention. As we shall see, Vico's sense of historical relativism is developed by Auerbach into a critical theory of literary history and, of course, of mimesis.

Firstly, it is important briefly to rehearse some of the central tenets of Vico's "science." Vico's concern, broadly, is with the limitations of human knowledge, limitations which he tries to articulate in order to challenge Cartesian principles of cognition. Pursuant to this, he posits a distinction between what he calls certainty and truth (*certum* and *verum*).[6] The distinction between the true and the certain precipitates further distinctions: knowledge and consciousness (*scienza* and *coscienza*); philosophy and philology. Paragraphs 137-139 of *The New Science* articulate this series of distinctions:

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[4]See René Wellek, "Auerbach and Vico", and Timothy Bahti, "Vico, Auerbach, and Literary History", both in Giorgio Tagliacozzo ed. *Vico: Past and Present* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1981); Luiz Costa-Lima, "Erich Auerbach: History and Metahistory", *New Literary History* , 19, 3 (Spring 1988).

[5]See Auerbach, "Vico's Contribution to Literary Criticism"(1958) in his *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur romanischen Philologie* (A. Francke AG: Bern, 1967); Auerbach, "Vico and Aesthetic Historism"(1949) in his *Scenes From the Drama of European Literature* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1973). These two essays postdate the composition of *Mimesis*, but Auerbach's engagement with Vico in general predates *Mimesis*; see the bibliography of Auerbach's works which is appended to his last work *Literary Language and Its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Bern, 1958; London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965).

[6]The importance of this distinction is argued by, among others, Isaiah Berlin, who writes: "Vico's fundamental distinction, as everyone with the least acquaintance with his writings knows, is between *verum* and *certum*." See "A Note on Vico's Concept of Knowledge" in Giorgio Tagliacozzo and Hayden V. White eds, *Giambattista Vico: An International Symposium* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1969), p.371.

> Men who do not know what is true of things take care to hold fast to what is certain, so that, if they cannot satisfy their intellects by knowledge (*scienza*), their wills at least may rest on consciousness (*coscienza*).
>
> Philosophy contemplates reason, whence comes knowledge of the true; philology observes that of which human choice is the author, whence comes consciousness of the certain.
>
> This axiom by its second part includes among the philologians all the grammarians, historians, critics, who have occupied themselves with the study of the languages and deeds of peoples: both at home, as in their customs and laws, and abroad, as in their wars, peaces, alliances, travels, and commerce.[7]

Proceeding from this distinction, Vico undertakes two seemingly contradictory tasks. The first is to abandon the human pursuit of *verum*, to abdicate the kind of exhaustive knowledge claimed by philosophers. This would overcome what Vico calls the conceit of nations and of scholars. The conceit of nations, according to Vico, is a form of cultural essentialism:

> On the conceit of nations, there is a golden saying of Diodorus Siculus. Every nation, according to him, whether Greek or barbarian, has had the same conceit that it before all other nations invented the comforts of human life and that its remembered history goes back to the very beginning of the world.(*NS*, para.125, p.61)

The conceit of scholars is a kind of cognitive parallel of this mistaken cultural essentialism:

> To this conceit of nations is added that of scholars, who will have it that what they know is as old as the world.(*NS*, para.127, p.61.)

On the other hand, Vico's second undertaking, which is indeed the greater ambition of *The New Science*, is to reconcile *verum* and *certum*, to

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[7]*The New Science of Giambattista Vico*, trans. Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch (Naples, 1744; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), pp.62-63. Hereafter, *The New Science* will be abbreviated to *NS*, and paragraph and pages references to this edition will be incorporated into the text.

develop, as his title indicates, a new science (*scienza*). In paragraph 140, immediately after establishing the distinction between *verum* and *certum*, Vico contemplates this reconciliation:

> This same axiom (para. 138) shows how the philosophers failed by half in not giving certainty to their reasonings by appeal to the authority of the philologians, and likewise how the latter failed by half in not taking care to give their authority the sanction of truth by appeal to the reasoning of the philosophers. If they had done this they would have been more useful to their commonwealths and they would have anticipated us in conceiving this Science.(*NS*, para.140, p.63)[8]

To approach this reconciliation, Vico turns to a kind of humanist social materialism as the material for his study, establishing this social materialism as the truth for which his new science is searching:

> But the philosophers have not yet contemplated His providence in respect of that part of it which is most proper to men, whose nature has this principle property: that of being social.(*NS*, para.2, p.3)

Investigating this social property of human existence leads Vico, in paragraph 331, to articulate his great distinction between the world of nature and the world of nations:

> ... there shines the eternal and never failing light of a truth beyond all question: that the world of civil society has certainly been made by men, and that its principles are therefore to be found within the modifications of our own human mind. Whoever reflects on this cannot but marvel that the

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[8]Vico, of course, did not set out his task exactly in this fashion, but this seeming contradiction between these two aspects of his work is, it seems to me, extremely important. On the one hand, as Berlin notes, history - in the very broad sense which Vico employs - "falls on the *scienza-verum* side" of the division between truth and certainty, or, as Martin Jay argues, "he included knowledge of history in the *verum* category". See Berlin "A Note on Vico's Concept of Knowledge", p.372; Martin Jay, "Vico and Western Marxism" in *Vico: Past and Present*, p.197. On the other hand, this reconciliation involves, as paragraph 140 suggests, a rethinking of the nature of both truth and certainty. This is emphasized by Bergin and Fisch in their comprehensive introduction to *The New Science*: "The pursuit of coscienza of the certain is philology or history; the pursuit of *scienza* of the true or the common (eternal principles) is philosophy. Thus far, *scienza* in the narrow sense. But it is in a wider sense that the term *scienza* is used in the title of Vico's work, and in that wider sense it embraces both philology and philosophy"; see *The New Science*, p.xxx. Luiz Costa-Lima's article "History and Metahistory" deals with this in some detail; see pp.473ff.

> philosophers should have bent all their energies to the study of the world of nations, or civil world, which, since men had made it, men could come to know.(*NS*, p.96)

Vico, then, traces the development of social customs - religion, marriage, burial - in order to study the different historical and cultural ways in which they have become institutionalized. These institutions, however, are a matter of historical emergence, their nature, he says, is "a coming into being (*nascimento*) at certain times and in certain guises"(*NS*, para.147, p.64). In order to study these historical institutions, Vico proceeds "by severe analysis of human thoughts about the human necessities or utilities of social life ... our science is therefore a history of human ideas"(*NS*, para.347, pp.103-104).

Very broadly, Vico claims two main achievements in *The New Science*. The first is his insistence on the priority of the social in human existence, as both the pursuit of his science and as what makes it possible as a science.[9] The second of Vico's claims is more ambitious. Having identified the historical development of institutions as a response to the requirements of society, Vico tries to find the universal principles of the world of nations. Thus, Vico establishes a tension between the

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[9]The priority of the social in Vico's science is one of the most suggestive aspects of his work, as it makes possible parallels between Vico and many other, later developments in philosophy. Perhaps the most important of these parallels is with Marxist historical materialism. As discussed above, Lukács made several references to Vico, suggesting a relationship on which Martin Jay has commented at some length; see Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, pp.107ff. It is beyond the scope of this study to trace conceptual links between Vico and other traditions of thought and certainly to consider the question of direct influence. Nonetheless, it is important to see how an emphasis on the social and historical is a constant thread which runs through much of the work discussed in this part of the present study. Fisch and Bergin, for example, argue that "Vico shares with the Marxists and the existentialists the negative view that there is no human essence to be found in individuals as such, and with the Marxists the positive view that the essence of humanity is the ensemble of social relations, or the developing social institutions"; see *The New Science*, p.xxxix. The relationship between Marxism and Vico is further discussed by Eugene Kamenka who suggests that while Vico's materialism presages Marxism there is no evidence of direct influence, Vico being more of a suggestive forerunner than a founder of developments in philosophy such as Marxism; see Eugene Kamenka, "Vico and Marxism" in *Giambattista Vico: An International Symposium*. Other suggestive parallels include Vico's similarities with the traditions of the human sciences, which, as we have seen, influenced the young Lukács and are central to the development of contemporary hermeneutics; see H.A. Hodges, "Vico and Dilthey" in *An International Symposium*. Vico's thought is also concordant with aspects of Bakhtin's dialogic epistemology, which places great import on the social character of language; see Hwa Yol Jung, "Vico and Bakhtin: A Prologomenon to any Future Comparison", *New Vico Studies*, 3 (1985).

historicizing aspects of his science and the demand for universal principles which are the defining features of science:

> There must in the nature of human institutions be a mental language common to all nations, which uniformly grasps the substance of things feasible in human social life and expresses it with as many diverse modifications as these same things may have diverse aspects.(*NS*, para.161, p.67)

By arriving at this common mental language, Vico hopes to arrive at the scientific principles of history, which, he claims, establish a cyclical pattern of historical ages, within which the institutions of each nation follow certain developmental principles.[10]

Vico's study of the world of nations, within his conception of cyclical history, takes the form of an analysis of various institutions - language, law, government - trying to show how each passes through particular phases of historical cycles, and how each has manifested itself as a universal principle of the social and historical development of nations.[11]

Vico's ambition to outline "an ideal eternal history traversed in time by the histories of all nations"(*NS*, para.393, p.124) notwithstanding, his method suggests that each phase of historical development is, at once, complete within itself, and yet relativized by the possibility of its historical development. The development of human institutions, which is the subject of his science, will always incorporate a sense of the changeability of these institutions. As Costa-Lima puts it:

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[10]The cyclical pattern which Vico identifies is what he calls the "course the nations run" from an age of gods, through an age of heroes, to an age of humans. Institutions develop in each of these ages and then undergo a "recourse"; see paragraphs 393-399, pp.124-126. It is beyond the scope of this study thoroughly to investigate Vico's understanding of cyclical history. Rather we are concerned with his development of a historicist method which is central to his approach to human institutions.

[11]Vico's use of the idea of nations warrants some clarification. Following his philological/etymological method, he defines a nation as the birth of a system of institutions. More specifically, by nation he means ancient historical civilisations - Egyptians, Greeks, Romans. For complex reasons, he excludes the Hebrews from his analysis on the grounds that their traditions, being sacred, were always marked by a continuity between the sacred and the secular and that therefore the distinction between the two kinds of "worlds" from which he proceeds was inapplicable.

> Truth is no longer identified with a single standard but is conditioned by a necessarily bifurcated knowledge.
> The commentary above already allows us to see that the reflection on the *certum*, assuming the enhancement of historical object, implies a conception of history - a relativistic conception of history.[12]

The principles of historical investigation in *The New Science* complement some of the ideas Vico had established in his earlier work *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians*. There Vico propounded perhaps his most well-known idea, the *verum-factum* principle. In this work, Vico follows a philological etymological method which establishes synonymic equivalencies between words and equivalencies between concepts associated with particular words which, he argues, establish the kind of ideas which he later developed as the study of the world of nations:

> For the latins, *verum* (the true) and *factum* (what is made) are interchangeable, or to use the customary language of the Schools, they are convertible. For them, the verb *intelligere* is the same as "to read perfectly" and "to have plain knowledge." In addition, their *cogitare* was the same as our vernacular "to think" (*pensare*) and "to gather" (*andar raccogliendio*). And for them, *ratio* meant the reckoning of arithmetical ratios as well as man's endowment by which he differs from and surpasses brute animals.[13]

This prefigures Vico's discussion of the "made" qualities of the human world, of which, although they are associated with the *certum*, by virtue of this conceptual equivalence between *verum* and *factum*, it is possible to establish certain truths. This rethinking of the idea of truth with regard to historical studies is the principal achievement of *The New Science*, and, importantly, the kind of philosophical approach which Auerbach

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[12]Luiz Costa-Lima, "Erich Auerbach: History and Metahistory", p.476. The reflection on the *certum* to which Costa-Lima refers is reflection on history before it is reintegrated into a new idea of *verum*.

[13]Giambattista Vico, *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians* , trans. L.M. Palmer (Naples, 1710; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), p.45. I have here acceded to the view that there is an important continuity between this work and *The New Science*, but the matter is certainly not without contention. Palmer's introduction to this volume discusses this in some detail; see p.15.

inherited and developed within the context of modern literary theory and criticism.

(b) Auerbach as student of Vico

Auerbach is extremely forthcoming about his relationship with Vico, and in "Vico's Contribution to Literary Criticism" he makes clear the ways in which Vico's approach influenced his own. Auerbach begins by considering the general purpose of Vico's project, what Auerbach calls "Vico's historical epistemology." Auerbach reformulates paragraph 331 of *The New Science*, emphasizing the historical and political implications of Vico's thought. He writes that Vico's epistemology

> is based on the principle that there is no cognition without creation; only the creator knows what he has created himself. Thus, the physical world (*il mondo della natura*) has been created by God; therefore only God can understand it. But the historical or political world, the world of mankind (*il mondo delle nazioni*), can be understood by men, because men have made it.[14]

Importantly, Auerbach also pays particular attention to Vico's sense of what is meant by "history." He characterizes Vico as having expanded the subject matter of history:

> he enlarges the meaning of history to such an extent that it comprehends the whole of social life. His term *il mondo delle nazioni* includes not only political history in its specific sense, but also history of expression, of language, of script, of the arts, of religion, of law, of economics, since all these parts of human activity originate from the same conditions, i.e. the specific state of the human mind at a given time.("Vico's Contribution, p.260)

Auerbach's understanding of the way in which Vico conceives of history leads him to endorse what he interchangeably calls Vico's historicism or

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[14]Auerbach, "Vico's Contribution to Literary Criticism" (hereafter, "Vico's Contribution"), p.259. Further references will be included in the text.

"historism."[15] Differentiating between Vico and the anti-historical tendencies of his epoch, Auerbach argues that, despite his belief in an "ideal eternal history," Vico establishes a "historical relativism or perspectivism"("Vico's Contribution", p.260) and, moreover, that this historicism is the guiding principle of *The New Science*. Auerbach continues by emphasizing the complexities of this kind of historicism:

> Historicism is not eclecticism. It is a difficult and infinite task to understand the particular character of historical forms and their interrelations ... Each historian (we may also call him, with Vico's terminology, 'philologist') has to undertake this task for himself, since historical relativism has a two fold aspect: it concerns the understanding historian as well as the phenomena to be understood. This is an extreme relativism; but we should not fear it.("Vico's Contribution, p.262)

History, then, the study of the *certum*, makes the historian *and* the history relative. But, as Auerbach is concerned to make clear, this relativism makes history even more rigorous, more important a scholarly pursuit. Finally, Auerbach echoes Vico's own arguments for the reconvergence of the *certum* and the *verum*, of philology and philosophy:

> Thus the truth for which philosophy is searching appears to be linked with philology, exploring the particular *certa* as well as their continuity and connection. This connection, the whole course of human history, *la commue natura delle nazioni*, is the subject of Vico's work, which therefore, may be called as well a philosophical philology as a philological philosophy - dealing exclusively with mankind on this planet.
> This is Vico's idea of philology which I learned from him.("Vico's Contribution", p.265)

Auerbach thus acknowledges his debt to Vico, and, while he draws away from endorsing Vico's analysis without qualifications, his adoption of Vico's method is an important element of his own literary theory. This was made clear in an earlier essay, "Vico and Aesthetic Historism". Here

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[15]Auerbach sometimes used the term historism, rather than historicism, to describe Vico's approach, but his term doesn't imply something different to what is usually called historicism.

Auerbach emphasizes the importance of historical perspective in aesthetics:

> A critic who would condemn the art of Shakespeare or of Rembrandt or even the drawings of the ice age primitives as being of bad taste because they do not conform to the aesthetic standards established by classical Greek or Roman theory would not be taken seriously by anybody.
> This largeness of our aesthetic horizon is a consequence of our historical perspective; it is based on historism, i.e., on the conviction that every civilization and every period has its own possibilities of aesthetic perfection; that the works of the different peoples and periods, as well as their general forms of life, must be understood as products of variable individual conditions, and have to be judged each by its own development, not by absolute rules of beauty or ugliness.[16]

In this passage, Auerbach illuminates the problems, the absurdity even, of tendencies towards universalizing aesthetic claims and standards. His argument resembles Jakobson's interrogation of the term realism, which suggested that realism is a shifting, or relative, concept. While such an understanding, to a certain extent, compromises the very ambition of realism, it also suggests that to characterize realism as a kind of aesthetic claimant of objectivity, or some other "essentialism," is to fail to appreciate the fundamental relativism which is built into all artistic representations. To claim objectivity for realism, and to charge it as making such a claim are the same kind of error, both of which would, Auerbach might have suggested, have been avoided if a properly historicist perspective were adopted. Auerbach goes on to relate this sense of aesthetic historicism specifically to Vico's general historicism, closing the essay with a reaffirmation of Vico's characterization of human nature as historical:

> Against all contemporary theorists, who believed in an absolute and unchanging human nature as opposed to the variety and changes of history, Vico created and passionately maintained the concept of the historical nature of men. He identified human history and human nature, he conceived human

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[16]"Vico and Aesthetic Historism" (hereafter, "Aesthetic Historism"), pp.183-184.

> nature as a function of history.("Aesthetic Historism", p.198)

As we shall see, it is a development of this kind of aesthetic historicism which sustains and motivates *Mimesis*, once again affirming the importance of Vico's methodological influence on Auerbach.

The placement of Auerbach within this context of philosophical historicism has led to important developments in the interpretation of Auerbach's work. René Wellek, surveying the evidence of the relationship between Auerbach and Vico, expresses serious reservations about Auerbach's use of Vico, as well as concerns about the implications of relativism for literary scholarship. Despite Wellek's ambivalence towards Auerbach's relativism (his review of *Mimesis*, as we shall see, was especially critical of these tendencies), his account of Auerbach's Vico scholarship reinforces the extent to which Auerbach's literary theory can be said to be predicated upon an insistence upon historical perspective.

Timothy Bahti, and, more recently, Luiz Costa-Lima, develop Auerbach's historicism in a more complicated manner. Bahti recapitulates the suggestive resemblances between Vico and German historicism, citing Auerbach as an important convergence of the two traditions, particularly insofar as Bahti characterizes Auerbach as having Hegelianized Vico. He quotes Auerbach and emphasizes the idealist implications of Auerbach's historicism:

> the abundance of events in human life in secular time constitutes a *totality*, a *complete course* or an *intelligible whole* in which each particular happening is variously rooted and out of which each can find its interpretation.[17]

This claim of Auerbach's clearly evinces a kind of Hegelian terminology, recalling Lukács' Hegelian theory of history, as well as hinting at the hermeneutic implications of Auerbach's interpretation of Vico. Bahti then stresses how Auerbach's particular method of literary history realizes the

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[17]Bahti, "Vico, Auerbach and Literary History", p.101. In this article Bahti is considering a group of six essays which appear successively in Auerbach's *Gesammelte Aufsätze*. Of these, the last two - "Vico's Contribution to Literary Criticism" and "Vico and Aesthetic Historism" - were written in English. The quotation in Bahti is from Auerbach's 1932 essay "Vico und Herder".

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complexities of his understanding of history which, as we have seen, characterizes the very nature of humankind. Auerbach, Bahti suggests, doesn't merely practice literary history, but insists upon literary history as, in a sense, the *verum* of literary criticism.

This importance of literary historicism has a kind of reciprocal effect on the discipline of history itself, which is again traced to Vico's interpretation of myth as history. Bahti attributes to Vico the suggestion that the "historical interpreter makes history, the history or world of human society, in *writing* that very history."[18] This idea, of course, has generated recent developments in the theory and philosophy of history which are concerned with the relationships between history, interpretation, and narrative, and which have been comprehensively explored by Hayden White who has developed the notion of "metahistory" to signify work in this area.[19]

Luiz Costa-Lima suggests a relationship between Auerbach and this kind of historical thought. Costa-Lima rehearses Auerbach's relationship with Vico and the way in which he develops Vico's historicism. In particular,

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[18]Bahti, "Vico, Auerbach and Literary History", p.106.

[19]It would, of course, be impossible to consider these matters in any depth in this study, but some notes are necessary. Hayden White's *Metahistory* is an extended discussion of the ways in which and the extent to which the understanding of history depends upon certain interpretive and philosophical presuppositions. In an introductory footnote, White conceives of his task as a kind of complement of literary theory. The interrogation of "realism" in literary theory - White indeed cites Auerbach - investigates the use of the historical in realistic art whereas he (White) asks: "what are the 'artistic' elements of a 'realistic' historiography ?"; see *Metahistory*, p.3, n.4. In this book, and in two collections of essays - *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978) and *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987) - White develops the notion that historiography is a constitutive element of what is understood. Moreover, historiographical interpretation depends upon certain kinds of figurative (tropical) relationships which determine the narrative structure of the history, and, in turn, evince the epistemological, ethical, and political implications of particular historical texts; see, for merely one example, "Interpretation in History" in *Tropics of Discourse*, p.70 ff. The study of the tropes of history is what White calls metahistory which, he suggests is responsible for the reconvergence of history and the philosophy of history, a move which recalls Vico's recombination of philosophy and philology; see the introduction to *Metahistory*, "The Poetics of History." White is not the only theorist of history to emphasize the interpretive and poetic aspects of historiography. E.H. Carr's *What is History ?* (1961; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990) is an important precursor to White's work, and historians such as Michel de Certeau display similar concerns to those of White; see Michel de Certeau, *L'ecriture de l'histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978); see also Robert H. Canary and Henry Kozicki eds, *The Writing of History: Literary Form and Historical Understanding* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978).

Costa-Lima emphasizes how Auerbach inherits the tension, in Vico, between his emphasis on the particular, the *certum*, and his intention towards the eternal, the *verum*. He speaks of a double movement in *The New Science*:

> what seemed to be an iron circle, where the interpretation of historical material was contained within the limits of a relativistic approach, becomes now a delta, where specifically historical material and transhistorical constancies are blended. It is only through this intermingling that we may grasp, without violating the Viconian text, the double movement of his *Scienza Nuova*.[20]

Here Costa-Lima is reformulating the "newness" of the new science, its commingling of philology and philosophy. He goes on to suggest that Auerbach's theory of realism is indivisibly related to his sense of the tension inherent in historicism, and adds that it was a failure to appreciate the importance of this tension which led Wellek to review *Mimesis* unfavourably.[21] For Auerbach, he says, "[t]ruth is always displaced according to new temporal values and parameters."[22] That is to say, at a conceptual level it is constant, but at a substantive level it is variable. He goes on specifically to relate this tension to *Mimesis*. This mediation between relativity and universality which, Costa-Lima says, "is an inheritance from Vico",[23] guarantees

> the singularity of the texts and, at the same time, the continuity that flows through them. This belief is consubstantiated in *Mimesis* and in the metamorphosis to which realism is subjected.[24]

This tension between, in Viconian terms, the *certum* and the *verum*, the double movement towards the particular and the universal is the crucial element of Auerbach's literary history. Costa-Lima argues that Auerbach is interested in mimesis precisely because it provides an occasion for the development of a metahistorical dimension in aesthetics. Metahistory - incidentally, Costa-Lima's use of this term certainly seems to evoke the

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[20]Costa-Lima, "History and Metahistory", p.477.
[21]Costa-Lima, "History and Metahistory", pp.469-470.
[22]Costa-Lima, "History and Metahistory", p.484.
[23]Costa-Lima, "History and Metahistory", p.494.
[24]Costa-Lima, "History and Metahistory", p.485.

work of Hayden White - is carefully to be distinguished from extrahistory. Rather than standing outside history, immune to the effects of particular historical circumstances, a metahistorical perspective reconciles the particularities of history with an abstract constancy, that of the *historicity* of these particularities. Neither the *certum* nor the *verum* is meaningful in itself, each must be understood in terms of the other. Rather than representing an eternal "truth" or merely charting historical differences, the idea of mimesis intermingles each of these tendencies in a sophisticated critical approach which Costa-Lima calls metahistorical.[25]

Placing Auerbach in the context of this kind of radical historicism emphasizes his critical awareness of the complexities of his own task and of the problems of realistic representation. His critical historicism lends his study of the representation of reality a similarly sophisticated theoretical underpinning that belies the supposed antithesis between mimetic aesthetics and anti-foundational critical thought. Furthermore, the ineluctable tension within Auerbach's historicism reveals the enormous complexities of realistic representation from which Auerbach proceeds. While conceptually the idea of realistic representation may be an aesthetic universal, Auerbach reveals and negotiates between the variables which contest within this idea.

This sense of Auerbach's critical sophistication leads Michael Holquist to suggest that, despite Auerbach's subtitle reading like "a litany of terms now perceived as hopelessly atavistic", *Mimesis* can be understood as a "foundational document" of recent developments in cultural criticism.[26] Holquist's emphasis on the contemporary relevance of *Mimesis* proceeds from his placing Auerbach in the context of German neo-Kantian historicism. Holquist considers how each of Auerbach's terms -

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[25]See "History and Metahistory", pp.494-495. Costa-Lima doesn't specifically invoke Hayden White, but the relationship between Costa-Lima's article and White's work is strongly suggested by Costa-Lima's title. The principle of mediation between the particular and the universal, which as I have discussed, is the very novelty of *The New Science*, has an interesting parallel in Bakhtin's linguistic theory, especially insofar as Costa-Lima calls this idea metahistorical. As I shall discuss below, Bakhtin/Voloshinov developed a theory of language which similarly mediates between the particular and the universal and which takes issue with linguistic theories which fail to account for the social character of language. This theory is called either translinguistics, or, more often, metalinguistics; see V.N Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. Ladislav Matejka and I.R. Titunik (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986).

[26]Michael Holquist, "The Last European: Erich Auerbach as Precursor in the History of Cultural Criticism", *Modern Language Quarterly*, 54, 3 (September 1993), p.372.

Representation; Reality; Western; Literature - has been problematized by neo-Kantian thought. Beginning with "representation," Holquist suggests that Auerbach's terms must be understood in the context of neo-Kantianism:

> Representation in *Mimesis*, then, is best understood within the tradition of concerns animating the Baden school. Thus, while Auerbach pays acute attention to style in the various authors he studies, the aesthetics of style concern him less than the power of a particular syntax, grammar, and vocabulary choice to represent a worldview in the technical, Diltheyan sense.[27]

In particular, Holquist draws attention to parallels between Auerbach's approach and that of Dilthey. Of Dilthey's method, Holquist writes:

> By insisting on a "philosophy of life," he sought to highlight the sheer contingency of knowing. In doing so, he addresses the condition that current versions of cultural criticism often name "situatedness." In Dilthey, however, experience is saved from the unsharable chaos of utter relativism because the subject, as conceived in the human sciences, is driven to know life not as disconnected episodes but as a whole.

This is what Dilthey calls a "worldview," which, Holquist says:

> is a theoretical term for the fatedness in human perception of making experience always coincide with a meaning. Its emphasis betrays Dilthey's Kantian heritage. But worldview is *neo*-Kantian insofar as it legislates different meanings on the basis of different experiences.

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[27]Holquist, "The Last European", p.378. Holquist's article gives a brief account of the two main strains of neo-Kantian thought in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth centuries; see p.374. For a more detailed treatment, see Thomas E. Willey, *Back to Kant: The Revival of Kantianism in German Social and Historical Thought, 1860-1914* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1978), pp. 131 ff. Dilthey, as Holquist points out, was not so much a member of the Baden school, but rather an influential contemporary. Dilthey's development of the human sciences paralleled the Baden school's "single-minded concentration of history"; see "The Last European", p.374.

Dilthey, he says, "in effect systematizes Vico's *verum factum*"[28] principle, and Dilthey's - and Rickert's and Windelband's - theoretical problems are comprehensively reflected in *Mimesis*:

> *Mimesis* remains an important paradigm in the search for models of history because it so successfully realizes the theoretical aspirations of classical German *Geistesgeschichte*, particularly as articulated by Dilthey.[29]

Moving on to the term "reality"," Holquist once more places Auerbach's sense of what reality means in the context of the Baden School's contemplation of the problem of how to synthesize individual sensory experience of the world with transpersonal consistency:

> Reality, as Auerbach specifically invokes *Wirklichkeit*, would seem to have at least two meanings, one that has to do with the reality of individual experience and another that bears on extrapersonal forces (social, economic, cultural) that shape history.[30]

Holquist examines how Auerbach synthesizes these two ideas of "reality" by drawing a parallel between representation and experience. The distinction between unmediated experience and the *meaning* of that experience is overcome by the imperative to make experience meaningful. But, in the context of the human or cultural sciences,[31] meaning, as

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[28]Holquist, "The Last European", p.375. These comments illustrate several complex consistencies between Auerbach and Dilthey, and suggest other important connections between the theorists discussed in this study. By characterizing Dilthey's project in terms of Vico's thought Holquist suggests a conceptual link between Dilthey and Auerbach, whose indebtedness to Vico is clear. Furthermore, this link between Dilthey and Auerbach establishes a connection between Auerbach and Lukács, whose heritage includes both Kant and Dilthey. As I shall discuss below, Holquist points out that Mikhail Bakhtin's thought develops in the same intellectual context as Auerbach's and that both were strongly influenced by neo-Kantianism, although Bakhtin drew more upon Cohen and the Marburg school. Parallels between Bakhtin and Dilthey have also been suggested by Tzvetan Todorov; see *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle* , trans. Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p.16 and p.22. Finally, Hans-Georg Gadamer's Diltheyan heritage is very clear, indicating that his work, too, shares concerns with that of Lukács, Auerbach, and Bakhtin.

[29]Holquist, "The Last European", p.373.

[30]Holquist, "The Last European", p.379.

[31]These two terms relate to the different ways in which various theorists conceived their approach. Dilthey, of course, set out to develop the *Geisteswissenschaften* whereas, according to Holquist, "Rickert introduced the term *Kulturwissenschaft*, which drew

Holquist points out, is only available in a social, historical context. Stressing the neo-Kantian heritage of this aspect of Auerbach's work, Holquist rehearses Auerbach's version of this sense-making imperative:

> The world available to the senses consists of things in themselves that we cannot know as such: *it must be organized into a perception. Erscheinung* helps us, moreover, to grasp the subject of representation as a reality drenched in history, in other words, as something problematical in as much as it arises in a matrix of signs. Because experience must be rendered as a meaning, it will always be different; cultures are defined by their ability to experience sensation both as uniquely theirs and as meaning sharable internally and, ultimately, with other cultures. *Thus reality is neither hopelessly relative nor hobbled by the arthritis of essentialism.*[32]

By placing Auerbach in another suggestive theoretical context - one which doesn't clash with the more familiar Viconian context - Holquist foregrounds the critical sophistication of Auerbach's thought; a sophistication which derives from, or at least is most fully expressed in, his study of the representation of reality. Auerbach's complicated philosophical education, as well as his own eventful history, turn towards the representation of reality as the aesthetic problem *par excellence* via which the problematic questions of experience, epistemology and literature may be explored.

(c) Auerbach's "special" realism

René Wellek's 1954 review of *Mimesis* criticized what he called Auerbach's "special" realism for its failure to make clear the unambiguous

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attention to extrapersonal social force as the most significant datum in historiography"; see "The Last European", p.377.

[32] Holquist, "The Last European", p.381, emphasis mine. The term *Erscheinung* , meaning, Holquist says, sensory sign, is, in a sense, the vehicle of this synthesis, although my account here doesn't incorporate Holquist's full analysis of how and why this is so. The important point is Holquist's suggestion that Auerbach conceives of reality as, at once, relative *and* meaningful. Furthermore, by drawing a parallel between Dilthey's and Auerbach's formulation of what he (Holquist) calls the "biographical principle," Holquist suggests that this mediation between individual experience and sharable meaning is a kind of epistemological imperative. That this synthesis takes place at the levels of culture and history means that culture and history are both necessary and relative, which is the basis of Holquist's characterization of *Mimesis* as a precursor of more recent cultural studies.

meanings of some of its important terms - like reality.[33] But as we have seen, this very complexity and ambivalence of the ideas associated with Auerbach's interest in realism constitute his most enduring contribution to literary theory and history.[34] In *Mimesis* the critical elements of Auerbach's method develop through his history of the different ways in which the interpretation and organization of reality have been historically conditioned, and the differing standards of realistic representation which have followed.

As is well-known, Auerbach begins *Mimesis* by positing a stylistic distinction between Homeric and biblical modes of representation, arguing that each style bespeaks, as Holquist suggests, a "worldview," a different mode of endowing experience with transpersonal meaning, a different way of understanding "reality." His assessment of the Homeric text resembles some of the arguments levelled against realistic representation by such theorists as Adorno and Althusser. The Homeric representation, he says, is cast in a "perpetual foreground":[35]

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[33]René Wellek, "Auerbach's Special Realism", *Kenyon Review*, 16 (1954).

[34]Timothy Bahti stresses the significance of the reconvergence of literary theory and literary history in Auerbach's *Mimesis*; see Timothy Bahti "Auerbach's *Mimesis*: Figural Structure and Historical Narrative" in Gregory S. Jay & David L. Miller eds, *After Strange Texts: The Role of Theory in the Study of Literature* (University of Alabama Press, 1985), p.127 and p.145. See also Holquist, "The Last European", p.372. On the other hand, however, Auerbach's endurance is not always attributed to his critical sophistication. Paul Bové, for example, considers Auerbach in terms of the extent to which his approach valorizes what seems to be a kind of "genius" theory, the appeal of which to professional academics is part of the reason for Auerbach's endurance; see Paul Bové, *Intellectuals in Power: A Genealogy of Critical Humanism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

[35]*Mimesis*, p.11. Again, parallels between Auerbach's work and that of Lukács and Bakhtin are noteworthy at this point. All three proceed by distinguishing between the epic and another, more complicated mode of representation. For Lukács and Bakhtin the difference is between the epic and the novel, while Auerbach's analysis proceeds from a distinction between the epic and the bible which gives rise to two "stylistic lines" of literary development, the biblical line eventually evolving into the realistic novel of the nineteenth-century. Bakhtin develops a similar bifurcated view of literary history, characterized by the distinction between novels which try to suppress "heteroglossia" and those which embrace it; see M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981). The affinity between Auerbach and Bakhtin can also be seen in their analysis of the treatment of time in narrative. Auerbach says of Homeric heroes that their "destiny is clearly defined ... (they) wake every morning as if it were the first day of their lives"; *Mimesis*, p.12. This resonates with Bakhtin's notion of "adventure time" and the "image of the *ready-made* hero" as he articulates them in an essay on the *bildungsroman*; see M.M. Bakhtin, *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays*, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. Vern W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), p.11, p.20, and *passim*.

> The Homeric poems ... are yet comparatively simple in their picture of human beings; and no less so in their relation to the real life which they describe in general. Delight in physical existence is everything to them, and their highest aim is to make that delight perceptible to us. Between battles and passions, adventures and perils, they show us hunts, banquets, palaces and shepherds' cots, athletic contests and washing days - in order that we may see the heroes in their ordinary life, and seeing them so, may take pleasure in their manner of enjoying their savory present, a present which sends strong roots down into social usages, landscape, and daily life. And thus they bewitch us and ingratiate themselves to us until we live with them in the reality of their lives ... And this "real" world into which we are lured, exists for itself, contains nothing but itself; the Homeric poems conceal nothing, they contain no teaching and no secret second meaning. Homer can be analyzed, as we have essayed to do here, but he cannot be interpreted.(*Mimesis*, p.13)

Bewitchment, ingratiation, and allure; these are the attributes of Homeric "realism," a suggestion which paradoxically recalls, or rather prefigures, arguments levelled against realism for its complicity with ideology. Macherey posits the idea of "illusion" as the aesthetic counterpart of ideology which, we might say, bewitches readers into acceptance. Similarly, Catherine Belsey's claim that realism is "ultimately reassuring" resembles Auerbach's suggestion that Homeric representation "ingratiates" itself with the reader.[36]

But this kind of "realism" is not, of course, what Auerbach endorses. "It is," he says, "all very different in the Biblical stories"(*Mimesis*, p.14). The biblical mode of representation, which develops into the stylistic line in Western literature which includes the realistic novel of the nineteenth-century, is the antithesis of the epic mode. In contrast to the Homeric text, which is in the "perpetual foreground," the biblical text is "fraught with background."

Auerbach amplifies this expression, deepening the contrast between the epic and the bible. While the lives of the Homeric heroes are, Auerbach

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[36]For references to Macherey's and Belsey's comments, see my discussion of their works in chapters 2 and 3 above.

says, "clearly defined", the Bible incorporates a more complicated sense of history into its representations:

> How fraught with background, in comparison, are characters like Saul and David ! How entangled and stratified are such human relations as those between David and Absalom, between David and Joab ! Any such "background" quality of the psychological situation as that which the story of Absalom's death and its sequel (II Samuel 18 and 19, by the so-called Jahvist) rather suggests than expresses, is unthinkable in Homer. Here we are confronted not merely with the psychological processes of characters whose depth of background is virtually abysmal, but with a purely geographical background too.(*Mimesis*, p.12)[37]

The assimilation of this depth of background marks the distinction between the two representational modes. Auerbach contrasts Odysseus - "on his return ... exactly the same as when he left Ithaca two decades earlier" - with, among others, David - "the harp player ... the old king"(*Mimesis*, p.17).

The entangled, stratified human relations which constitute the "background" of the biblical narrative make necessary the *interpretation* of the biblical text. While, Auerbach says, the perpetual foreground of the Homeric text makes analysis and explication possible, it is not possible to interpret the epic representation; lacking depth, it cannot provide deeper or more complex material. The Bible, on the other hand, does not merely enable interpretation, it *requires* it:

> In the story of Isaac, it is not only God's intervention at the beginning and the end, but even the factual and psychological elements which come between, that are mysterious, merely touched upon, fraught with background; and therefore they require subtle investigation and interpretation, *they demand them*. Since so much in the story is dark and incomplete, and since the reader knows that God is a hidden God,

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[37]That Auerbach characterizes the depth of background as "abysmal" prompts an interesting parallel with the development of the idea of the "abyss" in contemporary literary theory. Implying unfathomable depths of interpretive potential, the abyss has been used a metaphor for the deconstructive effects of post-structuralist theory; see, for example, Frank Lentricchia, *After the New Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

> his effort to interpret it constantly finds something new to feed upon.(*Mimesis*, p.15, emph. mine)

The primacy of interpretation, however, is tempered, in the case of the Bible, by the explicit truth-claim of the text. On the one hand the Bible is "deep" and "mysterious;" on the other, it must establish itself as true. This tension between the possibilities of interpretation - the interpreter constantly finding something new - and the claim to absolute truth, establishes, in a sense, the model of interpretation which will gradually emerge as the literary theory of *Mimesis*. The possibilities of interpretation, and the constraints upon interpretation, create a reciprocating process which takes new material and makes sense of it even as the criteria of sense-making are constantly renewed and revised:

> interpretation in a determined direction becomes a general method of comprehending reality; the new and strange world which now comes into view and which, in the form in which it presents itself, proves to be wholly unutilizable within the Jewish religious frame, must be so interpreted that it can find a place there. But this process nearly always also reacts upon the frame, which requires enlarging and modifying.(*Mimesis*, p.16)

Interpretation itself, then, is subject to development which, as Auerbach sees it, accounts for the historicity of biblical representation, which, in the history of higher criticism, passes from the legendary-historical - when the events of the narrative are taken as phenomena of ordinary life - to the legendary - when the representations are taken as figurative.[38] The "realism" of the Bible, and its doctrinal truth, necessarily diverge. But,

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[38]Auerbach's discussion of the nature of the legendary and the historical in this chapter reveals his Viconian roots quite profoundly. Vico was concerned, as we have seen, to establish the social, political, and historical status of myths, which gave way to different ideas of the socio-historical according to the development of each nation within its cyclical pattern. The "maturity" of nations led them away from poetic/mythic representations towards more sophisticated modes of historical representation. Auerbach says that "[i]n the stories of David, the legendary, which only later scientific criticism reveals as such, imperceptibly passes into the historical", but historical distance reverses this juxtaposition, as the legendary becomes revealed as such. However, while Homer remains within the sphere of the legendary, with the biblical text, "even in the legendary, the problem of the classification and interpretation of human history is already passionately apprehended"; see *Mimesis*, p.20. The Homeric text merely illustrates the way in which legend and history coincide within certain contexts while the Bible, according to Auerbach, conceives of itself more problematically. It is, as Costa-Lima would seem to suggest, "metahistorical," after the fashion of Vico's new science itself.

nonetheless, the Bible, which exemplifies both the need for and the problem of interpretation establishes a kind of prototype of realistic representation which is a vehicle for critical literary theory.

This prefigurative function of the biblical mode of representation is further evident in Auerbach's stylistic analysis of each text. The doctrine of the "separation of styles" is , for Auerbach, perhaps the major impediment to the development of realistic representation which embodies his sense of historical relativism. Mimesis, he argues, is served best at those points in literary history where this doctrine is eroded. The development of Western literature with which *Mimesis* is concerned is, as Auerbach sees it, roughly bifurcated between texts which maintain a separation between the everyday, or realistic, and serious representation, and texts which erode the separation of styles. Auerbach says that the rule of the separation of styles "specified that the realistic depiction of daily life was incompatible with the sublime and had a place only in comedy or, carefully stylized, in idyl". Although Homer is, Auerbach says, far from entirely beholden to this rule, "domestic realism, the representation of daily life, remains in Homer in the peaceful realm of the idyllic". In the Bible, however, daily life is "sublime, tragic, and problematic", breaking down the separation of styles and paving the way towards the development of the aesthetics of modern realistic representation.[39] When what we know as the realistic novel emerges, mimesis, the development of which Auerbach has been tracing, becomes a principal function of the text.

As Auerbach points out, his comparative analysis of two ancient texts provides the basis, the "starting point," for his investigation of the representation of reality. Auerbach's stylistic analysis of the Homeric text leads him to suggest that the epic representation betrays a simple apprehension of reality which confounds Auerbach's own sense of problematic historicity. On the other hand, the style of the Bible reinforces his view of history. A stylistic analysis reveals

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[39]See *Mimesis*, p.22. Auerbach's sense of how the everyday is limited to comic or unproblematic, idyllic representation essentially reformulates the usual history of modern literary realism which began to include a broader social range of characters and events within serious prose narrative. Northrop Frye's analysis of the "high" and "low" mimetic modes - realism being a specific kind of low mimesis - deals with the same phenomenon within a different critical theoretical framework; see *Anatomy of Criticism*, pp.49 ff.

> certain parts brought into high relief, others left obscure, abruptness, suggestive influence of the unexpressed, "background" quality, multiplicity of meanings and the need for interpretation, universal-historical claims, development of the concept of the historically becoming, and pre-occupation with the problematic.(*Mimesis*, p.23)

These concerns indicate the critical dimension of Auerbach's method. Parallels with Lukács, and with Bakhtin, are once again evident in Auerbach's evocation of the idea of historical "becoming," a critical advance over the static "being" suggested by the Homeric text. Above all, the biblical mode of representation is concerned with the problematic, with the vagaries of everyday life, a concern which is, as Auerbach sees it, at the heart of the very idea of realistic representation. Hermeneutic tension, mediating between interpretive possibility and interpretive necessity, is the defining feature of Auerbach's historicist aesthetics which, like Vico's science, seek to develop a philosophical approach which countenances both the *verum* and the *certum*.

As *Mimesis* develops, Auerbach undertakes a historiographical series of stylistic analyses which proceed from the distinction established in his analysis of the Homeric and biblical texts. Each text is considered in terms of the extent to which it, like the Bible, overcomes the separation of styles and, thus, manages to integrate its representation with a critical and problematic apprehension of reality. In Gregory of Tours' *History of the Franks*, for example, Auerbach traces the evidence of a "fraught background" to the events of the narrative. The sixth-century historian, he says, has employed a conversational style in his narrative, including the direct discourse of the characters, which recreates a sense of actual participation in the events. Events are not entirely clear. A servant is killed, but the narrative does not supply a reason, and the identity of the killer can only be inferred. The events of the narrative step forward from an indistinct background. By using the spoken language of the people involved, Gregory's narrative, he says, breaks down the rigid separation of styles of discourse, integrating the literary and the vernacular which lends his narrative a sense of what Auerbach calls "the directly sensible," the real.

By contrast, Auerbach's analysis of the *Chanson de Roland* reveals a different representational practice at work. The narrative is presented as a series of vignettes with no assimilation of temporal development. Similarly, in the twelfth-century romance - represented in Auerbach's history by Chrétien de Troyes' *Yvain* - the knightly ideal which sustains the knight's adventures stands against the representation of historical reality. Not only is a rigid separation of styles maintained between representations of different classes, but the narrative follows a temporal progression of "adventure time," which denies any sense of historical becoming.

Auerbach's analysis traces the way in which representational practices which failed to embody a historical epistemology and which maintained the classical separation of styles, gradually gave way to mixed styles and historical situatedness in narrative. As Bahti points out, *Mimesis*, proceeding from the comparative analysis of the epic and biblical modes of representation, has two critical moments which most clearly evince Auerbach's theoretical convictions[40]. These are the eighth and eighteenth chapters of *Mimesis*, which analyse, respectively, Dante's *Inferno* and the development of the realistic novel in the nineteenth-century.

Dante, of course, is a key figure in the development of Auerbach's literary theory. In an earlier book, Auerbach argued that the *Comedy* represented the development of a mode of representation which apprehended the historical quality of human reality, and, more importantly perhaps, he hinted at what he saw as the implications of the *Comedy* for the very idea of aesthetic realism.[41] Dante's claim of realism, as the epilogue to *Mimesis* notes, was one of the catalysts of Auerbach's interest in realism.[42] Dante is an important figure in *Mimesis* because of the extent to which Auerbach's

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[40]Bahti, "Auerbach's *Mimesis* ", p.33. Bahti's article undertakes a detailed analysis of the importance of the idea of *figura* in Auerbach's work. Auerbach's long essay of 1944, "Figura", sets out an etymological analysis of the term *figura*, and goes on to develop the idea of *figura* as a complicated mediation between history and truth. Bahti concentrates on this and argues for a relationship between Auerbach's analyses of Dante and Flaubert within which Dante establishes the idea of the figural and Flaubert establishes the fulfilment of the idea of the figural, establishing the figural as the true.

[41]Erich Auerbach, *Dante: Poet of the Secular World*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Berlin, 1929; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), pp.178-179.

[42]Auerbach writes that his "original starting point was Plato's discussion in book 10 of the *Republic* ... in conjunction with Dante's assertion that in the *Commedia* he presented true reality; *Mimesis*, p.554.

stylistic analysis reveals a concern in the *Comedy* with the problematic nature of reality and of representation. In Dante, Auerbach says, the antagonism between styles is clearly apparent; nowhere else, he says, "does mingling of styles come so close to violation of all style"(*Mimesis*, p.185). Dante's narrative is a stylistic concatenation:

> all imaginable spheres of reality appear: past and present, sublime grandeur and vile vulgarity, history and legend, tragic and comic occurrences, man and nature; finally, it is the story of Dante's - i.e., one single individual's - life and salvation, and thus a figure of the story of mankind's salvation in general. Its dramatis personae include figures from antique mythology ... allegorical personifications ... Apollo, Lucifer, and Christ ... Yet ... all these things are not so new and problematic as Dante's undisguised incursions into the realm of a real life neither selected nor preordained by aesthetic criteria. And indeed, it is this contact with real life which is responsible for all the verbal forms whose directness and rigor ... offended classicistic taste. Furthermore, all this realism is not displayed in a single action, but instead an abundance of actions in the most diverse tonalities follow one another in quick succession.(*Mimesis*, p.189)

But the crucial aspect of Dante's representational practice, according to Auerbach, is the way in which it seems to embody an important contradiction. On the one hand, Dante is concerned with the concrete historical qualities of earthly life. On the other, this earthly existence is superimposed upon the Christian paradigm of the eternal:

> Here we face the astounding paradox of what is called Dante's realism. Imitation of reality is imitation of the sensory experience of life on earth - among the most essential characteristics of which would seem to be its possessing a history, its changing and developing. Whatever degree of freedom the imitating artist may be granted in his work, he cannot be allowed to deprive reality of this characteristic, *which is its very essence*. But Dante's inhabitants of the three realms lead a 'changeless existence.' ... Yet into this changeless existence Dante 'plunges the living world of human action and endurance and more especially of

> individual deeds and destinies.'(*Mimesis*, p.191, emph. mine)[43]

Auerbach reiterates this point several times:

> Dante, then, took over earthly historicity into his beyond; his dead are cut off from the earthly present and its vicissitudes, but memory and the most intense interest in it stirs them so profoundly that the atmosphere of the beyond is charged with it.(*Mimesis*, p.193)

> This enables us to understand that the beyond is eternal and yet phenomenal; that it is changeless and of all time and yet full of history.(*Mimesis*, p.197)

This contradiction within what Auerbach calls Dante's realism, the tension between the embodiment of historicity and the representation of the eternal, suggests two important points for consideration. The first is the way in which Auerbach sees in Dante's method the elaboration of what he (Auerbach) calls a figural schema. Auerbach's sense of a figural schema involves a relationship of signification which avoids privileging either the figure or its fulfilment. Referring to his earlier essay "Figura", Auerbach says that such a schema allows both figure and fulfilment "to retain the characteristics of concrete historical reality"(*Mimesis*, p.195) unlike symbolic or allegorical relationships which subordinate one to the other.[44] Within Dante's narrative the earthly reality, captured in its historical totality by Dante's mixture of styles, is the figure of eternal life, which is similarly marked by a sense of the social and historical, despite its changelessness. The characters speak and behave in the beyond as they do within earthly reality. The historicity of earthly reality is, thus, *fulfilled*, by being preserved in eternity.

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[43]The quotation in this passage is not referenced but I suspect it comes from Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics*, from which Auerbach derives the phrase "changeless existence." Geoffrey Green's study of Auerbach comments on Hegel's influence on Auerbach, particularly insofar as Auerbach's analysis of Dante is concerned. See Green, *Literary Criticism and the Structures of History, Erich Auerbach and Leo Spitzer* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), pp.22-23. Timothy Bahti also details the Hegel connection arguing that Auerbach "Hegelianized" Vico, by concentrating upon the tension between the relative and the universal in Vico's own thought; see Bahti, "Vico, Auerbach and Literary History", p.103.

[44]Bahti considers the many ways in which a figural relationship is evoked in *Mimesis*, and, as mentioned previously, posits Dante's realism as the figure and Flaubert's as the fulfilment of the representation of historical reality.

The second important feature at the heart of the idea of the figural relationship is the critical tension in Auerbach's theory. The image of eternal historicity in Dante's narrative parallels the complexity of interpretation which Auerbach articulated in his discussion of the Bible. Interpretation is at once relativistic and unifyingly meaningful, and so it is with Dante's text which represents the beyond as both earthly and eternal. This tension requires revised understandings of truth and of relativity, the very revision which informed Vico's development of his "new" science which mediated between the *certum* and the *verum*, the historical and the true. It is this tension that commentators have seized upon as the aspect of Auerbach's work which gives it its enduring quality. Importantly, this tension is not only an aspect of Auerbach's own method, but is, according to Auerbach, to be found in mimesis itself.

As *Mimesis* progresses the tension between representations which continue the historicist method - such as those of Gregory of Tours and of Dante - and those which do not, continues to be the focus of Auerbach's analysis. Boccaccio, he says, fails to appreciate the problematic historical quality of everyday life, lapsing into classical comic or idyllic modes to represent contemporary reality. In the fifteenth- and sixteenth-centuries, Antoine de la Sale and Rabelais, Auerbach argues, develop the emphasis on the representation of the sensory. An important advance upon Dante's method is achieved by Montaigne, who, Auerbach says, "displays himself embedded in the random contingencies of life"(*Mimesis*, p.309). While Dante had emphasised the social and linguistic historicity of reality by transposing it into eternity, Montaigne, Auerbach claims, breaks through this reliance on the figural relationship imposed by a Christian framework:

> his creatural realism has broken through the Christian frame within which it arose. Life on earth is no longer the figure of the life beyond; he can no longer permit himself to scorn and neglect the here for the sake of a there. Life on earth is the only one he has.(*Mimesis*, p.310)

Historical reality, then, becomes its own horizon, and, indeed, the secularization of world-view which Montaigne reflects makes the apprehension of the world problematic:

> The disconcerting abundance of phenomena which now claimed the attention of men seemed overwhelming. The world - both outer world and inner world - seemed immense, boundless, incomprehensible. The need to orient oneself in it seemed hard to satisfy and yet urgent.(*Mimesis*, p.310)

Once again, Auerbach is concerned with a sense of tension which is characteristic of the apprehension of the social world. Orientation, like interpretation, is at once difficult and yet necessary, even inevitable. This is what Auerbach calls the problem of orientation:

> the task of making oneself at home in existence without fixed points of support. In him (Montaigne) for the first time, man's life - the random personal life as a whole - becomes problematic in the modern sense.(*Mimesis*, p.311)

Auerbach's terms and concepts resonate with those of the early Lukács; a sense of spiritual homelessness, the problematic nature of social reality. Not only does his theory evince a sense of these problems, but he also insists, as did Lukács, on the almost ironic necessity of confronting problematic social life, on the need to forge an artificial reintegration of phenomena of experience into a meaningful whole.

This recognition of the onerousness of making sense of what possesses in itself no inherent meaning reaches its zenith in the realistic novel of the nineteenth-century. In his analyses of Stendhal, Balzac and Flaubert, Auerbach discusses how ordinary everyday life has not only become suitable for serious representation, i.e. the separation of styles is irreversibly broken down, but has also become the very essence of representation. In Stendhal, for example,

> characters, attitudes, and relationships of the dramatis personae ... are very closely connected with contemporary historical circumstances; contemporary political and social conditions are woven into the action ...(*Mimesis*, p.457)

Auerbach suggests that Stendhal's turn to realistic representation was occasioned by his own "homelessness." "For the first time," he writes, "the

social world around him became a problem"(*Mimesis*, p.461). This may be understood literally - Auerbach relates some of Stendhal's personal difficulties - but might more profitably be understood epistemologically - apprehending the world becomes problematic. As a response, he turns towards that very world, in all its variable, historical detail, presaging the materialist aesthetics which Lukács would develop in a similar response to the problematic world. Auerbach claims Stendhal as the founder of modern realism:

> Insofar as the serious realism of modern times cannot represent man otherwise than as embedded in a total reality, political, social, and economic, which is concrete and constantly evolving - as is the case today in any novel or film - Stendhal is its founder.(*Mimesis*, p.463)

What Auerbach claims as Stendhal's achievement in his literary practice again coincides with Auerbach's theoretical achievements: a social materialism as the basis of the apprehension and representation of reality and an inherent tension between its concreteness and its historicity.

Balzac, too, stands as a founder of realism in Auerbach's sense:

> He (Balzac) not only, like Stendhal places the human beings whose destiny he is seriously relating, in their precisely defined historical and social setting, but also conceives this connection as a necessary one: to him every milieu becomes a moral and physical atmosphere which impregnates the landscape, the dwelling, furniture, implements, clothing, physique, character, surroundings, ideas, activities, and fates of men, and at the same time the general historical situation reappears as a total atmosphere which envelops all its several milieux.(*Mimesis*, p.473)

The *necessity* of these interrelations once again reveals Auerbach's insistence on the importance, in the face of extreme relativism, of developing a sense of concrete reality. And, again, the basis of this is the sense of historical materialism which informs all of Auerbach's literary theory. This historicity, according to Auerbach, is crucial to realism as it developed in the nineteenth-century novel. Balzac and Stendhal, he says, regard:

> creative and artistic activity as equivalent to an activity of a historical-interpretive and even historical-philosophical nature ... (they conceive) the present as history - the present is something in the process of resulting from history.(*Mimesis*, p.480)

This is the basis of modern realism as Auerbach understands it. At once, realism is concerned with historical representation even as it undermines its own representational claims by embodying a philosophical and interpretive historicism. What might be called the "embeddedness" of realism is, according to Auerbach, developed further by Flaubert whose representations emerge more gradually from their atmosphere than those of Balzac and Stendhal.

These writers, or, rather, the representational methods of these writers, enjoy a certain privilege in Auerbach's literary history. More than other methods, the techniques and devices of nineteenth-century realism undertake seriously to represent everyday life; the classical separation of styles is broken down and temporal development is fully assimilated into narrative form. For Auerbach, this serious representation of social and historical reality inevitably presupposes the kind of historicist epistemology to which he holds:

> The serious treatment of everyday reality, the rise of more extensive and socially inferior human groups to the position of subject matter for problematic-existential representation, on the one hand; on the other, the embedding of random persons and events in the general course of contemporary history, the fluid historical background - these, we believe are the foundations of modern realism, and it is natural that the broad and elastic form of the novel should increasingly impose itself for a rendering comprising so many elements.(*Mimesis*, p.487)

Auerbach's summary of what he calls modern realism reveals the critical dimension which he imports to it: the "embeddedness" of the fictional action within historical background, which is itself, as he says, fluid, gives realism not an objective-positivistic basis, but a problematic-existential one. These elements are contained in a tension-filled relationship with the need for maintaining a sense of representational meaning. Finally, Auerbach, like Lukács and Bakhtin, although not nearly to the same

degree, suggests that the novel is the form most particularly suited to this kind of anti-universalist representational practice.

Auerbach's history of mimesis continues through and beyond the crucial nineteenth-century novel. The methods and styles of the Brothers Goncourt and of Zola are analysed and considered in terms of Auerbach's conception of realism as "a serious representation of contemporary everyday social reality against the background of a constant historical movement"(*Mimesis*, p.518). He also mentions, in passing, the development of this aesthetic in literatures other than those with which he is most familiar; German and Scandinavian literature, English and Russian.

The final chapter begins with Virginia Woolf. Auerbach integrates Woolf's stream-of-consciousness into his theory of realistic representation. While narrative styles more commonly associated with realism presuppose the lack of a governing authority in the apprehension and representation of reality - the *manque de base* implicit in social reality - their representational practices set themselves against this problem. This is the critical tension of Auerbach's theory, the admission of relativism counterposed against a demand for meaning. In Woolf, Auerbach says, this tension has been released and relativism overcomes meaning:

> there actually seems to be no viewpoint at all outside the novel from which the people and events within it are observed, any more than there seems to be an objective reality apart from what is in the consciousness of the characters. Remnants of such a reality survive at best in brief references to the exterior frame of the action ...(*Mimesis*, p.534)

But Auerbach maintains that this representational style proceeds from the same basis as all realistic representation. That is, "that it is a hopeless venture to try to be really complete within the total exterior continuum and yet to make what is essential stand out"(*Mimesis*, p.548). Against this hopelessness, however, is Auerbach's drive towards meaning:

> We are constantly endeavoring to give meaning and order to our lives in the past, the present, and the future, to our surroundings, the world in which we live; with the result that our lives appear in our own conception as total entities - which to be sure are

> always changing, more or less radically, more or less rapidly ... (*Mimesis*, p.549)[45]

Auerbach sees realism as the holding-in-check of the collapse of meaning, a tension which derives from the very possibility of non-meaning. As we have seen, the basis for this is the historicist epistemology which Auerbach derives from Vico. The development of modern fiction as represented by Woolf is, then, a kind of surrender, a turn away from social and historical reality as a source of meaning. He still characterizes Woolf's narrative as realistic; but it is a reality of random occurrences, which, he says, constitute a human universality:

> It is precisely the random moment which is comparatively independent of the controversial and unstable orders over which men fight and despair; it passes unaffected by them, as daily life. The more it is exploited, the more the elementary things which our lives have in common come to light.(*Mimesis*, p.552)

But this, Auerbach says, is a simple solution, too simple, in fact. The resolution of human reality into this common interiority confounds the historicism to which Auerbach holds. Here, *Mimesis* betrays its author's sympathies most clearly. Auerbach's philological expertise and his commitment to historicism lends most of *Mimesis* an impressive comprehensiveness which these latter analyses lack. His comments become increasingly perfunctory, nowhere more so than in this uneasy chapter on Virginia Woolf, which closes with an indication of the real source of Auerbach's anxiety. Woolf's reality is too simple, he says, for those committed to an abundance of life and a sense of history. However,

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[45]This is what Holquist refers to as Auerbach's version of the biographical principle, whereby chance and accident become meaningful within life; see Holquist, "The Last European ...", pp.388-389. I have not discussed how Auerbach, like Lukács, is wary of modernism because of its implicit resignation to meaninglessness. In Auerbach's case this must be understood in light of his own biographical imperatives. His sense of cultural apocalypse - a Jewish refugee from Nazi Germany - challenges him to assert the worth and endurance of Western culture and history, which was then under extreme pressure. Auerbach closes *Mimesis* on a very personal supplicatory note, expressing his hope that scholars and scholarship will survive the trauma of the Second World War. This provides an interesting parallel to the way in which Lukács and his contemporaries responded similarly to their own sense of cultural and historical trauma, a parallel which might also be extended to the aesthetics of withdrawal which emerged from the Frankfurt School, whose members, like Auerbach, were refugees from Nazism.

> they are few in number, and probably they will not live to see much more than the first forewarnings of the approaching unification and simplification. (*Mimesis*, p.553)

Some parts of *Mimesis*, then, are, by virtue of Auerbach's expertise in certain areas, more penetrating than others. But nonetheless, as I have tried to show, his analysis of realism reveals a literary concept much more complicated than a simple transposition of a self-evident reality into literary form.

(d) History, aesthetics, and reality: Auerbach's philosophical contribution

The importance of the historical moment of *Mimesis* notwithstanding, Auerbach's work suggests that an aesthetics of realistic representation is not necessarily incompatible with a theoretical perspective which merits being called critical. Indeed, the converse would seem to be the case. Auerbach's commitment to realistic representation springs from his opposition to approaches which claim universality or objectivity. For Auerbach, everything must be understood as historical, and this understanding is the motivation for, rather than an objection to, realistic representation.

In his epilogue, as we have seen, Auerbach characterized the subject of *Mimesis*, as "the interpretation of reality through literary representation"(*Mimesis*, p.554). For Auerbach, interpretation is a complex process, a mediation between the need for meaning and all the different possibilities of meaning which the object of interpretation might deliver. Interpretation involves the reconciliation of a demand for cohesion with the impossibility of achieving exhaustive knowledge. Reality, according to Auerbach, must be "interpreted", and the practice of realistic representation is not only the product of such interpretation but is, perhaps more importantly, evidence of the necessity of interpretation before the idea of "reality" can have any substance.

Auerbach's work, then, can be understood as a set of related philosophical propositions. Not only has he contributed to the body of texts known as literary criticism, but his commingled examination of aesthetics and history can be distilled into a theory of being-in-the-world which, like his

aesthetic theory, involves and relies upon a tension between the need for meaningful existence and the concession that existence has no inherent meaning.

Auerbach's philosophy, like his literary criticism, rests upon fundamental contradictions, but these are not contradictions which Auerbach has failed to appreciate. Rather, he embraces contradiction because of its congeniality with his own anti-positivistic theory. Even his approach to contradiction involves a kind of paradox: on one hand, Auerbach's relativism suggests that these contradictions cannot be resolved; on the other, his interpretive imperative means that they must be addressed and their divergences must be mediated. Auerbach's sense of being, to return to Hegelian terms, is that it is a process of becoming. Auerbach's own sense of the broader implications of his literary criticism is clear. Taking Auerbach's work as a whole and placing his theory of realism against the background of his general theoretical convictions, we can see that his work is a kind of essay in historical interpretation and representation, occasioned by a heightened sense of cultural crisis. Auerbach's response to crisis was not to seek a resolution to conflicts between historical forces, but to develop a theory of culture which embraced contradiction. His own philological work, his historical analyses of ancient and less ancient texts, then traced the enduring presence of the tension between, broadly, meaning and non-meaning in history, employing mimesis as a vehicle for analysis, and establishing the realistic novel as one particularly apposite historical instance of mimesis.

Mimesis, then, is not only a history of realistic representation, but a theory of reality as mutable and as requiring interpretation. Auerbach's theory of reality embodies the tension which is so crucial to his aesthetic and historical theory. His Viconian heritage bestows upon him a revised understanding of the idea of truth; as we have seen, the subject of Vico's "new" scientific investigation is the "made-truth," a convergence of the *certum* and the *verum*. As Auerbach makes clear, his adoption of Vico's thought is precisely due to its relativising possibilities, and the aesthetic theories which he develops are marked by a similar sense of tension. His analysis of the Bible brings together its hermeneutic possibilities and its claim to universality. His theory of the figure goes beyond simplistic divisions between truth and falsity and contemplates a representational

relationship which makes both the represented and the representation indivisibly reliant upon one another.

The reason for Auerbach's emphasis upon realistic representation, then, is that it realizes the kind of anti-universalist epistemology to which he holds. His vision of reality is of an agglomeration of historical forces which require interpretation into a meaningful whole. As Auerbach sees it, mimesis, the literary symbol of this idea, is a testament to the ineluctability of historicist interpretation in the apprehension of reality which gives meaning to human experience. Consistent with Auerbach's sense of tension, this exercise is both necessary and incomplete, compelled to make sense of the world, and yet forced to confront the limitations of sense itself.

By using history and complicated philosophies of history as grounds of critique, Auerbach and Lukács provide some of the essential conceptual tools on which a new critical theory of realism might be founded. They are not by any means the only proponents of a critical philosophy of historical knowledge, but their particular importance for the present study is the way in which each juxtaposes a historical consciousness with the representation of social and historical reality, and each pursues his theory predominantly through literary criticism. Perhaps more importantly, the complexities of their respective theoretical enterprises establish that critical literary theory must embody a tension between the establishment of meaning and the contingencies of the historical conditions of meaning. That is, literary structures must, at once, be maintained and undermined.

In the critical works of Lukács and Auerbach the emphasis on historical becoming, on embeddedness, on narration and interpretation leads towards a conception of the representation of social and historical reality *as* critical thought itself. The supposed universalizing instincts, or naive empiricism, which are attributed to realism by those who argue for an anti-representational aesthetics, are, in fact, the very antithesis of the theoretical claims of Lukács and Auerbach. As we have seen, the turn to history is a means of maintaining a critical perspective, rather than a proposed return to some sort of ground of immutable truth.

Auerbach's theoretical efforts to negotiate between a sense of historical relativism and a continued faith in what we might broadly call knowledge lead him to embrace a range of theoretical and interpretive strategies. His adoption and adaptation of Vico's thought, among other things, provided him with a conceptual framework which addressed just this problem. As we have seen, Vico effected a convergence between two kinds of knowledge, the *certum* and the *verum*, creating a new concept of knowledge.[46] Auerbach's literary theory effects a similar synthesis, and achieves a cognate "newness." His various interpretive figures - the mimetic, the Christian, the figural - all reveal the complicated background of his attention to the representation of reality.

In the following chapter, as I have already indicated, I will take a different approach to the theoretical material. Rather than proceeding from a given theory of realism and then trying to unravel its critical roots, in the case of Bakhtin I shall begin with an explication and interpretation of his critical theory, and then turn to how such a theory might be incorporated into the present study.

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[46]Indeed, the English "science" is, in general usage at least, quite different to the Italian *scienza*. *The New Science* might have been called *The New Knowledge*.

- 6 -

Mikhail Bakhtin and the life of the word

... said words of the world are the life of the world.
- Wallace Stevens

Bakhtin's work is pervaded by multiplicity; as a scholastic approach, as an intellectual theme, and as a biographical/bibliographical condition. As Michael Holquist points out, "[a]ll of Mikhail Bakhtin's work stands under the sign of plurality, the mystery of the one and the many."[1] This plurality, or rather, these pluralities, on the one hand, recommend Bakhtin's thought to the present study. Encompassing many disciplines, issues, and approaches, Bakhtin's keen apprehension of heterogeneity certainly renders his theories "critical," insofar as he never, to recall Descombes' criterion, takes "the way it is" as an answer. More particularly, as I shall discuss, Bakhtin's sense of multiplicity - or differences or plurality, to employ other terms - is particularly sophisticated, involving a constant mediation between, in terms used by Holquist, the one and the many. Put very broadly, Bakhtin's project might be understood as an ongoing effort to think *both* the one and the many, without privileging nor sacrificing one or the other.

On the other hand, Bakhtin's "pluralism" must give pause to any further scholarship. The rapid and prodigious dissemination of Bakhtin's ideas in recent scholarship makes the integration of his thought into the present study a sensitive and complicated task. Reflecting upon this phenomenon, Holquist writes that "[i]n the great market-place of ideas, Bakhtin has obviously risen very high."[2] Bakhtin scholarship, we might say, is, in

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[1]Michael Holquist, "Answering as Authoring: Mikhail Bakhtin's Trans-Linguistics", *Critical Inquiry*, 10, 2 (December 1983), p.307. This issue of *Critical Inquiry* was specially devoted to Bakhtin. The articles from this issue, and other related articles, were subsequently collected in Gary Saul Morson ed., *Bakhtin: Essays and Dialogues on His Work* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986). Further references to articles other than "Answering as Authoring" will be to this volume.

[2]See Michael Holquist, "Introduction" in M.M. Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. Vern W. McGee, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), p.ix. Elsewhere Holquist points out that Bakhtin is among the three most frequently mentioned names in manuscripts edited to *PMLA*; see Michael Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his World* (London: Routledge, 1990), p.195. A scan of

every sense, "fraught with background." It is precisely the emphasis on pluralism which motivates the burgeoning interest in Bakhtin's work; debates about interpretation of Bakhtin, contested implications and applications of his work, and historico-biographical disagreements have generated the wealth of critical investigations to which Holquist refers.

Bakhtin's wide currency makes necessary several preliminary qualifications, as well as clearly demarcated objectives, before my own analysis proper of Bakhtin can proceed. This caution is necessary because, given the great critical interest in Bakhtin, several issues must be side-stepped. The first of these is the matter of Bakhtin's bibliographical plurality: the disputed texts. Rather than take a real position on this matter, I have chosen simply to accept that the works are thematically concordant, treating them as a related series of works to which I refer according to the ascribed author or authors in the English translation from which I am working.[3] But a second, and more important, matter is the

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bibliographic resources will confirm this tendency, the relatively recent MLA CD-Rom database reveals - in mid-1995 - well over 900 articles concerning Bakhtin.

[3]Although the matter of the disputed texts is not, as I have indicated, one of the primary concerns of the present study, it is certainly not an unimportant question and it is helpful, therefore, briefly to consider some of the arguments which have been forwarded by various Bakhtin scholars. The dispute turns on the question of the extent to which Bakhtin was the author of works published under the names of his associates, I.I. Kanaev, P.N. Medvedev, and V.N. Voloshinov. The most important of these are the two books attributed to Voloshinov - *Freudianism: A Marxist Critique*, and *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, and that attributed to Medvedev - *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*. The matter is complicated by the intellectual environment in which Bakhtin and his colleagues worked in the 1920's, prior to Bakhtin's arrest and exile, a thoroughly "dialogic" immersion in debates and discussions, collaboration and cooperation which certainly would have blurred intellectual property borders.
A detailed treatment of this issue and its important implications - such as the relationship between Bakhtin and Marxism - is beyond the scope of the present study. Briefly, opinion ranges from seeing Bakhtin as sole author of the disputed texts through theories of co-authorship to considering him no more than an influence on Voloshinov and Medvedev. English-language scholarship is particularly divided. Bakhtin biographers Clark and Holquist have maintained, on the basis of research in the Soviet Union, that Bakhtin was the author of the texts which were, for various reasons, published under his friends' names; see Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin* , Chapter 6, "The Disputed Texts". This view is challenged by Emerson and Morson in their introduction to *Rethinking Bakhtin* , where they canvass a number of objections to Clark and Holquist's position; see Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson eds., *Rethinking Bakhtin: Extensions and Challenges* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1989), pp.31ff. Morson and Emerson make their case again, and more extensively, in their study of Bakhtin, *Mikhail Bakhtin Creation of a Prosics*, (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1990), Chapter 3, "The Disputed Texts". Ken Hirschkop also summarizes the debate, listing its major participants and the extent to which their conclusions are based upon biographical "evidence" or upon analysis of the texts themselves; see Ken Hirschkop, "Critical Work on the Bakhtin Circle: a bibliographical essay", in Ken Hirschkop and David Shepherd eds, *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), p.196. Tzvetan Todorov

interpretation of Bakhtin, of which the authorship dispute is an important element. Although I don't propose to debate the matter at any length, it will be clear that my own analysis of Bakhtin relies upon certain interpretive conclusions about his work, conclusions which are by no means beyond debate.

(a) Bakhtin's words: problems of interpretation

The disputed texts are but one aspect of the curious history of Bakhtin's thought, which, particularly in Western scholarship, has given rise to two major questions or problems regarding the interpretation of his work. The first is the question of how his work should be understood in itself; how his various different phases, and the different concerns he addressed, relate to one another.[4] Once again, the matter is particularly fraught with debate. A very crude rendition of the major point of contention is whether there is a kind of continuity of thought between the major phases of Bakhtin's career, or whether the transitions were occasioned by major conceptual watersheds. The first view is suggested by the synoptic studies of Bakhtin by Todorov and by Clark and Holquist. Todorov suggests a kind of structural consistency to all of Bakhtin's endeavours. His earlier book on Bakhtin admits and emphasizes a "systematic perspective"[5] which, he concedes, is more a matter of his own approach than something necessarily immanent to Bakhtin's work. Todorov suggests that it is not only possible to trace a kind of deep structural consistency between all the various periods and concerns, but that there is also a kind of overall

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also sets out each point of view, arguing that the disputed texts *are* , in important ways, markedly different to those signed by Bakhtin himself. They are more self-contained, he argues, and more aggressively political. Nonetheless, he concedes that the body of work which includes the disputed texts and those not in dispute displays a homogeneity of thought which makes considering them *as* a body of work appropriate; Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*, pp.5-7. Soviet and Russian sources, on which much of this work is based, has been similarly divided. Recently, S.G. Bocharov has reasserted Bakhtin's authorship, once again on testimonial evidence; see S.G. Bocharov, "Around and About One Conversation", trans. Marian Schwartz, *Russian Studies in Literature*, 31, 4 (Fall 1995).

[4]Notwithstanding the major differences in the interpretation of Bakhtin which inform the most well-known commentaries, there is a general agreement that his career comprises four major periods. For a full account of these "periods" of activity in Bakhtin's life, and the different concerns and methods of each, see Clark and Holquist *Mikhail Bakhtin*. For a more compressed account, see Todorov, *The Dialogical Principle*, pp.11-12. Morson and Emerson actually provide a chart which details the works and concerns of each period; see Morson and Emerson, *Creation of a Prosaics*, p.66.

[5]Todorov, *The Dialogical Principle*, p.13.

structure to Bakhtin's work, an interdependence between his various periods and concerns. In a slightly later essay on Bakhtin, Todorov reiterates his sense of the consistency of Bakhtin's work. He suggests that

> Bakhtin never stopped seeking what may now appear to us to be something like different languages intended to express a single thought.[6]

The field of inquiry might change, Todorov suggests, as might the language or vocabulary in which Bakhtin expresses himself, but fundamentally, the investigations are the same.

A different version of the continuity thesis is offered by Clark and Holquist, and by Holquist on his own. Discussing one of Bakhtin's earliest essays, Holquist argues that

> it must be kept in mind that *it contains, in embryonic form, every major idea Bakhtin was to have for the rest of his long life.*[7]

In their critical biography of Bakhtin, Clark and Holquist reinforce this interpretation, suggesting that fundamentally Bakhtin was concerned with the long-standing philosophical problem of "stasis and change"[8] and that despite his keen apprehension of heterogeneity and multiplicity, and his concern never to resort to abstract systematizing, this problem lends his various investigations a kind of philosophical unity. Chief among his various inquiries, or, rather, his various achievements, is, of course, his highly original philosophy of language; dialogism. In a sense, dialogism is his most successful effort to come to terms with the philosophical problems which preoccupied him throughout his life.

In a comparative analysis of Lukács and Bakhtin, Eva Corredor exemplifies the continuity thesis by contrasting the two thinkers. Lukács' intellectual career certainly was marked by significant sea-changes (although, as we have seen, it is possible to trace consistencies in his

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[6]Tzvetan Todorov, *Literature and Its Theorists*, p. 82.
[7]Michael Holquist, "The Politics of Representation", in Stephen J. Greenblatt ed., *Allegory and Representation: Selected Papers from the English Institute, 1979-80* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), p.171.
[8]Clark and Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, p.8.

work). Corredor suggests that Bakhtin's career stands in contrast to that of Lukács because it is *not* marked by similar detours and reversals.[9]

The continuity thesis, however, has faced serious challenges. Ken Hirschkop, for example, claims that all interpretation of Bakhtin is necessarily and unavoidably selective, privileging some aspects of his work over others. Interpretation of Bakhtin, then, must be understood as an appropriation of some aspects of his thought, rather than as a holistic overview. He makes clear that this is his approach to Bakhtin:

> Inevitably the interpretation I shall offer privileges some texts and formulations of Bakhtin over others ... This is a methodological necessity in all criticism, but it is particularly true for Bakhtin: *there is no unified meaning behind these texts* and any act of interpretation must perforce endorse certain statements and reject others.[10]

Morson and Emerson contend the continuity thesis more extensively, taking issue with what they call the structuralist approach taken by Todorov, with Clark and Holquist's "'embryonic' model"[11], and with other attempts to, as they put it, "reduce Bakhtin's thought to a systematic unity."[12] Against the continuity thesis, they posit a career marked by "watersheds." They argue, specifically against Clark and Holquist, that Bakhtin abandoned and "outgrew" his early philosophical influences; he discovered the word, began to meditate on the vast possibilities of dialogue, and finally set about recapitulating his various investigations, tying together his various interests in a professional academic environment.[13] Morson and Emerson suggest a "mature" Bakhtin, who breaks decisively from his philosophical background to effect his own Copernican revolution.[14]

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[9]See Eva Corredor, "Lukács and Bakhtin: a dialogue on fiction", *The University of Ottawa Quarterly*, 53, 1 (1983), p.106.

[10]Ken Hirschkop, "Dialogism as a Challenge to Literary Criticism", in Catriona Kelly, Michael Makin, and David Shepherd eds., *Discontinuous Discourses in Modern Russian Literature* (London: Macmillan, 1989), p.20; emphasis mine. In a footnote to this passage Hirschkop sets his argument that Bakhtin's *oeuvre* cannot be considered uniform in any way against the efforts of Clark and Holquist to trace consistencies in Bakhtin's thought.

[11]Morson and Emerson, *Creation of a Prosaics*, p.6.

[12]Morson and Emerson, *Creation of a Prosaics*, p.7.

[13]See Morson and Emerson, *Creation of a Prosaics*, pp.64-68.

[14]Morson and Emerson, *Creation of a Prosaics*, p.53.

The differences between these two interpretations of Bakhtin recreate other interpretive conflicts over other thinkers. In this study, for example, we have seen Althusser positing a similar sort of distinction between the "early" and "mature" phases of Marx's development. But Lukács' (early) interpretation of Marx relies upon a continuity between Marx's Hegelian background and his position in *Capital*. Lukács himself has been the subject of interpretive debate; no-one denies that there are major shifts in Lukács' position over his career, but the extent to which these shifts represent a fundamental break is certainly not a concluded matter.

I do not propose to explore the relative merits of one or another of these interpretations of Bakhtin. As will become clear, my reading of Bakhtin's material - like my interpretation of Lukács - suggests that there *is* a discernible consistency to his thought. This doesn't mean, of course, that there are not important differences and changes in his work, and I don't believe that proponents of the continuity thesis have ever suggested otherwise. I suggest, rather, that there is a recognizable pattern to Bakhtin's approach in each of his phases. Each of his inquiries - from his early exercises on traditional philosophical topics to his redefinition of aesthetics and the theory of the novel - begins from a sense of tension between unity and multiplicity, and he tries, in each phase, to synthesize an approach which simultaneously countenances both. It is not so much that the ideas he develops with regard to ethics or epistemology lead directly to dialogue or to his theory of the novel, but that they are similar sorts of responses to questions with which Bakhtin was persistently concerned. Certainly there were changes as Bakhtin moved away from traditional philosophical concerns to a highly original focus on language, and his individual voice does emerge more strongly as he progresses, but, as I shall try to show, the idea of participatory being which dominates his ethical inquiries has clear links with the idea of dialogue which, in the final analysis, stands as his most important theoretical[15] development.

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[15]Throughout this discussion, the terms theory and theoretical need to be treated with extreme caution. Any characterization of Bakhtin's work as theoretical must take into account that to do so requires a fundamental revision of the idea of theory. Bakhtin, of course, is highly critical of theoreticism and theory (see particularly *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, ed. Vadim Liapunov and Michael Holquist, trans. Vadim Liapunov (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), p.55). If dialogics is to be considered a "theory," theory must be understood as a descriptive complement to practice or experience, rather than as a non-experiential basis of knowledge, which is how it used, for example, by Althusser. Holquist makes this point in his introduction to a volume which contains several early Bakhtin essays; see Michael Holquist, "Introduction: The Architechtonics of

If the question of the internal relationships of Bakhtin's thought is a point of contention, the second problem of interpretation is perhaps even more fraught. Whether Bakhtin's thought is conceived of as continuous or otherwise, the question of what *kind* of thought it is has been the subject of much controversy. It would be difficult here comprehensively to canvass this issue, but once again, it is necessary briefly to place my own interpretation of Bakhtin against this background. There are essentially three points to be considered: the first is the position, within Bakhtin's thought, of the idea of carnival, and its significant omission from the present study; the second relates to the different critical contexts into which Bakhtin's thought has been placed; the third might be called the question of Bakhtin's radicalism. As we shall see, these three issues are intimately related to one another. The position of the idea of carnival bears very heavily upon the context into which Bakhtin is placed which, in turn, informs the subversive capacity of Bakhtinian thought.

There is, not surprisingly, a difference of opinion over the importance of carnival within Bakhtin's thought as a whole. On the one hand, carnival has been perhaps the most enthusiastically mobilized of Bakhtinian categories, and it is helpful briefly to examine the features of carnival, and of Bakhtin's study of Rabelais, which might account for this. Basically, carnival has been understood as the most radical or subversive of Bakhtin's theories. The images of carnival are decidedly uncomfortable; the grotesque, the scatological, the hysterical. Such images, as well as the manifest concern with popular culture, allow Bakhtinian thought to be exercised outside traditional academic disciplines such as philosophy, linguistics or literary criticism. It countenances a revolt by the "low" against the "high" and, accordingly, facilitates attempts to revise the high culture/ popular culture dichotomy upon which great traditions are supposedly founded.

It is in this spirit that carnival is often evoked, as a radical practice which subverts official doctrines and discourses, an image which appeals to cultural theory which understands itself as transgressive, radical or subversive. But the widespread use of carnival has drawn criticism from

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Answerability" in M.M Bakhtin, *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov, trans. Vadim Liapunov (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), p.xx.

several quarters. Holquist, for example, protests against an overeagerness to appropriate carnival (and, indeed, all Bakhtinian categories) which amounts to "nothing more than a liberating licentiousness",[16] and elsewhere comments upon the imbalance which has resulted from the loss of most of a manuscript on the *Bildungsroman* which, dating from the same period as *Rabelais and his World*, moderates the view of Bakhtin suggested by the book on Rabelais.[17]

Morson and Emerson not only criticize the overuse of carnival but go so far as to argue that, within Bakhtin's *oeuvre*, the idea of carnival in general and *Rabelais and his World* in particular, are inferior:

> This carnival mode is the canonic base for a number of very peculiar appropriations of Bakhtin, from Marxist to deconstructionist, and, in our view, it has tended to obscure the larger and more consistent shape of his thought. Generally speaking, Bakhtin was much less concerned with millenarian fantasies and holy foolishness than with the constraints and responsibilities of everyday living. Carnival, while offering a profound insight into much of Rabelais and some of Dostoevsky, ultimately proved a dead end. In his last period, laughter but not the idealization of carnival anarchy remained - and the functions of laughter were more closely specified.[18]

In my analysis of Bakhtin, as will become clear, carnival is notably absent. The reasons for this absence are that I tend to accept the view that carnival is not central to Bakhtin's philosophical project, and that its efficacy must be limited to the analysis of specific kinds of cultural activity and that the literary concept with which we are concerned here - realism - falls outside the reach of the carnival. Indeed, as we shall see, the Bakhtinian text which is most explicitly concerned with realism is the remaining fragment of the manuscript on the *Bildungsroman* which Holquist suggests acts as a counterweight to carnival.

But it is not just a question of whether or not the Rabelais book is to be counted among Bakhtin's major works. As I have indicated, the application of carnival is one of the features which reveal the kind of

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[16]Holquist, *Dialogism*, p.108.
[17]See Holquist, "Introduction" in Bakhtin, *Speech Genres*, p.xv.
[18]Morson and Emerson, *Creation of a Prosaics*, p.67.

Bakhtin which is envisaged by different critics, it is one of the indices used to locate Bakhtin within contemporary critical debates. Bakhtin's emphasis on pluralities has suggested countless relationships between Bakhtin and any number of critical theories and theorists. Congenialities and antitheses between Bakhtin and other thinkers, his status as precursor of contemporary critical debates have been discussed at length, and, disconcertingly, there has been a tendency to adopt Bakhtin as a kind of "saviour"[19] in the post-deconstruction critical epoch. The complexities of this question, however, must be checked at the door. Bakhtin has been claimed for many contemporary critical traditions, from Marxism, with which he certainly had an important relationship, to postmodernism, with which his relationship is entirely a matter of eduction. Comprehensively to canvass these applications of Bakhtin's thought is beyond the scope of this study.[20]

But Bakhtin's place in this thesis places him, of course, in particular conceptual company, and explores his contribution only to literary theory and criticism. My reading of Bakhtin, as we shall see, also tends to emphasize not only the unity of his thought, but the place for unity *within* his thought. Once again, however, this interpretation of Bakhtin needs, if only briefly, to acknowledge challenging interpretations. In what follows I have insisted upon what might be called Bakhtin's "constructiveness," placed him in the company of Lukács and Auerbach, and applied his thought to a traditional concept in literary criticism. In doing so, I have offered a reading of Bakhtin which runs contrary to interpretations of Bakhtin which, either through differing interpretation,

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[19]The blurb to a recent collection of essays loosely inspired by Bakhtin, for example, begins by asking "is there life after deconstruction ?" The implied answer is "Yes - Bakhtin."

[20]A few references, however, are not. Ken Hirschkop's "bibliographical essay" (see note 3 above) is a good overview of some of the ways in which Bakhtin's thought has been linked with contemporary critical theory, to which the contributions to the Hirschkop and Shepherd volume *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory* can be added. Nancy Glazener, for example, claims that "Bakhtin's attempt to subvert the categories of meaning and identity *greatly resembles* the project of deconstruction"; see Nancy Glazener, "Dialogic subversion: Bakhtin, the novel and Gertrude Stein", in Hirschkop and Shepherd eds., *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory*, p.115, emph. mine. Malcolm Jones, in a review article of Morson and Emerson's *Creation of a Prosaics*, refers to the different approaches taken to Bakhtin by critical theorists and Slavists. Bakhtin, he says, is often "welcomed aboard as a guest and ally by those who have percieved his usefulness"; Malcolm V. Jones, "The creation of a prosaics: Morson and Emerson on Mikhail Bakhtin", *Comparative Criticism* 15 (1993) p.245. Subhash Jaireth rehearses some differences between recent Russian readings and non-Russian readings of Bakhtin; Subhash Jaireth, "Russian and Non-Russian Readings of Bakhtin: The Contours of an Emerging Dialogue", *Southern Review* , 28, 1 (March 1995).

or through a greater emphasis on carnival, or arguing affinities with different thinkers, contemplates a more radical or subversive Bakhtin. Hirschkop, for example, argues that the tenets of dialogism, which are fundamentally subversive, constitute a profound challenge to the institutional practice of literary criticism.[21] Elsewhere he vigorously challenges what he sees as an ideological appropriation of Bakhtin, particularly by Morson, Emerson, and Holquist, "the ultimate effect of which is to evade the most radical aspects of his work in favour of an interpretation that renders him useful in the argument against the recent advances of post-structuralism and recent literary theory in general."[22] He goes on to claim that such an appropriation "has blunted the most radical aspects of his thought" evincing a trend "toward an assimilation of Bakhtin into a liberal schema that he opposed".[23]

Certainly there is a radical and subversive tendency in Bakhtin's thought, but, as I shall try to show, there are equal tendencies *within* Bakhtin's work which must be simultaneously considered; the one, to return to the image with which this chapter began, and the many co-exist in Bakhtin's thought. Hirschkop's point that the interpretation of Bakhtin can amount to a kind of recruitment of Bakhtin seems to overlook his own interested rejection of what he calls a "liberal schema." This is pointed out by Morson who, in his response to Hirschkop, argues that "the words 'radical' and 'liberal' (like 'cold war' elsewhere) are compounds of vagueness and of a misplaced political appeal - the sort of approach that one of my friends labels 'lefter than thou.'"[24]

Clearly, the matter of which is the more appropriate image of Bakhtin - the "liberal" or the "radical" - cannot be debated here. My own "use" of Bakhtin concerns simply two related problems: the position of realism with regard to critical theory; and the efficacy of different kinds of critical theory. The use of Bakhtin in this context confounds both more radical interpretations of Bakhtin *qua* Bakhtin, and the employment of his thought in literary theory which rejects realism. However, as I shall try to

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[21]See Hirschkop, "Dialogism as a Challenge to Literary Criticism".
[22]Ken Hirschkop, "A Response to the Forum on Mikhail Bakhtin", in Morson ed., *Bakhtin: Essays and Dialogues on His Work*, p.74.
[23]Hirschkop, "Response", p.79.
[24]Gary Saul Morson, "Dialogue, Monologue, and the Social: A Reply to Ken Hirschkop", in *Bakhtin: Essays and Dialogues on His Work*, p.87.

show, although I have not set out to refute alternative interpretations, Bakhtin's thought does have a place in the present study.

This lengthy preamble has essentially been by way of qualification. With so contentious a body of work as Bakhtin's, any new interpretation runs the risk of being challenged at every turn, and I have tried to show that my interpretation doesn't claim to be definitive. My aim here will be to try to establish that the peculiarly tensile quality of Bakhtin's critical thought lends itself to my thesis which concerns the relationship between critical theory and literary realism. In order to do so, I shall set out a particular interpretation of the critical dimension of Bakhtin's thought, and concentrate upon its significance for the interpretation and theory of literature. Bakhtin's own literary theory is, of course, of great importance in this project and I shall try to show how this material supports my own application of Bakhtin's thought. Finally, I shall try to show how Bakhtin's thought complements the work of the other theorists discussed in this section, contributing to the development of the present thesis.

(b) Dialogue as action: Bakhtin's critical philosophy

Bakhtin, as is well-known, contributed numerous terms to the critical vocabulary, as well as giving existing terms complex new inflections: answerability, utterance, speech genre, text, chronotope, heteroglossia, polyphony, discourse, the novel. Most important, of course, is dialogue, Bakhtin's master category, the figure which essentially informs all of his theoretical investigations.[25] Before we turn to the idea of dialogue, however, it is necessary to explore, in a sense, its background, Bakhtin's early philosophy, in order to show what kind of critical presuppositions it rests upon and what kind of critical method it suggests.

As we shall see, dialogue, as an activity of language, and as a kind of trope of human existence, rests upon Bakhtin's apprehension of human life as social and relational. The importance of the social and relational is very clear in Bakhtin's early, more specifically philosophical writings, even

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[25]The critical literature emphasizes and articulates Bakhtin's notion of dialogue and explicates its range of applications in his work. The works by Clark and Holquist (*Mikhail Bakhtin*), Holquist (*Dialogism*), and Todorov (*The Dialogical Principle*) stress the centrality of dialogue to Bakhtin's whole conceptual schema while Morson and Emerson include dialogue as one of what they call Bakhtin's global concepts.

though, as Morson and Emerson point out, dialogue doesn't really emerge until Bakhtin's second period of activity and the first version of the book on Dostoevsky. The presence or otherwise of dialogue in these early writings is, in fact, one of the main points of contention between the continuity thesis and the watershed thesis.

Emerging from a strong neo-Kantian background[26] Bakhtin's concerns are the stuff of traditional philosophy: ethics and epistemology. Exploring these areas, Bakhtin's relational thought is readily apparent. In *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* Bakhtin mounts a critique of various forms of what he calls "theoreticism." Bakhtin argues against what he calls the theoretical world in which cognition, including ethical judgments, is divorced from experienced being:

> In that world we would find ourselves to be determined, predetermined, bygone, and finished, that is, essentially not living. We would have cast ourselves out of life - as answerable, risk-fraught, and open becoming through performed actions - and into an indifferent and, fundamentally, accomplished and finished theoretical Being (which is not yet completed and is yet to be determined only in the process of cognition, but to be determined precisely as a given) ... Any kind of *practical* orientation of my life within the theoretical world is impossible: it is impossible to live in it, impossible to perform answerable deeds.[27]

The targets of Bakhtin's philosophical critique are any attempts theoretically - that is, divorced from experience - to determine categories of consciousness. Ethics, for example, cannot be theoretically conceived:

> Actually, one cannot speak of any kind of moral, ethical norms, of any ought with a determinate content (we shall develop this in detail later on). The ought does not have any determinate content; it does not have a specifically theoretical content.(*TPA*, p.5)

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[26]For Bakhtin's relationship - intellectual and biographical - with Kant and neo-Kantianism see Clark and Holquist, "The Influence of Kant in the Early Work of Mikhail Bakhtin", in Joseph P. Strelka ed., *Literary Theory and Criticism* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1984); Clark and Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, pp.57ff. and *passim*; Holquist, *Dialogism*, pp.17ff.

[27]M.M. Bakhtin, *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, p.9. This unfinished text dates from c.1919-1921, but was among the last of Bakhtin's published works. All further references to quotations from this work (hereafter *TPA*) will be given in the text.

For Bakhtin, included in the idea of "theoreticism" are, as we have seen, ethical schemes, certain kinds of aestheticism[28], and what he calls pragmatism, which we might understand as various forms of determinism.[29]

Bakhtin's emphasis on the experiential motivates his critique of theoreticism. Experience, moreover, is relational; it depends upon the positioning of the experiencing subject. Bakhtin's classic statement on individual perception emphasizes this point:

> When I contemplate a whole human being who is situated outside and over against me, our concrete, actually experienced horizons do not coincide. For at each given moment, regardless of the position and the proximity to me of this other human being whom I am contemplating, I shall always see and know something that he, from his place outside and over against me, cannot see himself: parts of his body that are inaccessible to his own gaze (his head, his face and its expression), the world behind his back, and a whole series of objects and relations, which in any of our mutual relations are accessible to me but not to him. As we gaze at each other, two different worlds are reflected in the pupils of our eyes.[30]

Bakhtin's sense of the unique individuality of perception - which extends to all facets of being - constitutes the plurality with which theoreticism cannot, in his view, come to terms. He sets out, then, to try to develop a theory of what we might call participative thinking.[31] Towards this, Bakhtin identifies the fundamental relations which constitute

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[28]Bakhtin's critique of what he calls the "aestheticization of life" needs to be distinguished from his own approach which is also aesthetic. What he objects to is the conflation of the aesthetic with the theoretical, as opposed to his conflation of the aesthetic with the practical or participatory; see *TPA*, p.13. See also *Art and Answerability*, pp.64ff. The difference between these two kinds of aesthetics can be illustrated by Morson and Emerson's term "prosaic." Morson and Emerson detail how Bakhtin's aesthetic theory, for which they coin the term prosaics, is a challenge to the conflation of the aesthetic with the poetic. Poetics, they suggest, reduces aesthetics to the singular and unusual, and privilege verse. Prosaics, by contrast, privileges the novel, and concentrates on the ordinary, thereby changing the orientation of the aesthetic from a transcendence of life to a kind of co-extension with it.

[29]See *TPA*, p.12.

[30]Bakhtin, *Art and Answerability*, pp.22-23. Further references to this text will be included in the text and indicated by the abbreviation *AA*.

[31]See *TPA*, p.8.

participatory being[32] and some of the experiential material through which these relations are conducted. His long discussion of corporeality, for example, considers the function of the body in participatory being.[33] In an important preview of what would become a major preoccupation, Bakhtin says that language, too, implies, or at least should if it is being properly contemplated, what he calls participatory thinking.[34]

Proceeding from this opposition between theoreticism and the complicated idea of participation, Bakhtin develops several early theoretical figures which, in a sense, constitute a theory of the participatory. These are the ideas of answerability[35] and architectonics. For Bakhtin, answerability is a kind of category of relational being. It is at once an activity, a way of being responsive in the world, and the philosophical description of such being. At this stage, Bakhtin is clearly concerned with the ethical implications of relational being, or, rather, with the contribution to ethics of his theory of relational being. But answerability also has cognitive/epistemological implications, which are particularly suggestive of the method of Bakhtin's critical philosophy.

For Bakhtin, answerability, the necessity of thinking of ourselves in terms of answerability, is an ontological responsibility. The terms in which Bakhtin's idea of answerability reflect this: the *"non-alibi in being"*(*TPA*,

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[32]These are the relationships between "I and the other" - I-for-myself, the Other-for-me etc. - which Bakhtin discusses throughout these early essays; see, for example, *TPA*, p.54. As Holquist points out, Bakthin's work at this stage resembles phenomenological and existential thought, particularly that of Sartre; see Holquist, "Introduction: The Architectonics of Answerability", pp.xxviii-xxx.

[33]See *AA*, pp.47ff.

[34]See *TPA*, p.31. Bakhtin's emphasis here on the relational quality of language, although it certainly hasn't reached the complexity of dialogue is, I suggest, a major point in favour of the continuity thesis.

[35]The English translation of the Russian word *otvestvenost* has also been a point of contention. Clark and Holquist prefer to use "answerability," which, as well as making clear the ethical implications of Bakhtin's thought, also suggests a slide into a language-based approach, making Bakhtin's early work strongly prefigurative of his later use of dialogue. Vadim Liapunov, the translator of Bakhtin's early works, similarly prefers answerability. He writes that he uses "'answerability' instead of 'responsibility' in order to foreground the root sense of the term - answering; the point is to bring out that 'responsibility' involves the performance of an existential dialogue"; see *TPA*, p.80, n.9. Morson and Emerson contend that the more accurate translation is "responsibility," which makes clear the specifically ethical concerns and does not imply dialogue. This, they argue, makes clear that there was a "watershed" in Bakhtin's thought in the late 1920s and to use the word "answerability" is an anachronistic "reading-back" which makes it seem as if the early works are continuous with the later work on dialogue; see *Creation of a Prosaics*, pp.114-115.

p.40), *"obligative (ought-to-be) uniqueness"*(*TPA*, p.42), "our principled relationship to things and to the world"(*AA*, p.5).[36] We have, then, the first indication of a peculiar kind of tension in Bakhtin's thought. On the one hand, he sets out a radical critique of ethics, of abstract "theoretical" ethical schemes, arguing that they are fundamentally inadequate because of their failure to take account of participatory Being. On the other hand, however, the critique of ethics becomes a very strong demand for ethical behaviour, and participatory Being involves a constant ethical demand, to behave ethically *without* an abstract set of guidelines. The act, then, is liberated from abstract rules of behaviour, but bonded to its own answerability.

In a more general philosophical sense, answerability can be understood as the "truth" of participatory, multiplicitous Being. By thinking of unique experience as answerable to its environment, the uniqueness of individual experience, activity, or perception can be incorporated into universal ideas of experience:

> In its answerability, the act sets before itself its own truth [*pravda*] as something-to-be-achieved - a truth that unites both the subjective and psychological moments, just as it unites the moment of what is universal (universally valid) and the moment of what is individual (actual). This unitary and unique truth [*pravda*] of the answerably performed act is posited as something-to-be- attained *qua* synthetical truth [*pravda*].
> What is ... unfounded is the fear that this unitary and unique syntheical truth [*pravda*] of the performed act is irrational. The actually performed act in its undivided wholeness is more than rational - it is *answerable*. Rationality is but a moment of answerability, [2-3 illegible words] light that is "like the glimmer of a lamp before the sun" (Nietzsche). (*TPA*, p.29)

We can see, then, in the figure of answerability, the shape of Bakhtin's critical method. Proceeding from an apprehension of plurality, Bakhtin

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[36]Despite Bakhtin's "pluralism," these early writings imply a very tough ethical rigorousness in Bakhtin's thought, which suggests yet another parallel with Sartre, whose ideas of radical freedom and faith were similarly demanding. Bakhtin reinforces the ethical non-alibi by arguing that even acting as a representative does not diminish one's personal answerability; see *TPA*, p.52.

develops the idea of answerability, not to overcome plurality, but to reconcile plurality with unity. Answerability, once again, can be understood in terms of "the one and the many." It is, on the one hand, the relation of the one to the many, but it is also the overarching category of truth, the unifying principle of an otherwise multiplicitous Being.

Understanding Being as answerable then leads Bakhtin to consider what he calls "architectonics," the way in which the world is put together out of all the different perspectival and axiological beings which constitute it. Architectonics is the concept which Bakhtin uses to account for concrete unique experience. While Bakhtin's apprehension of plurality means that the whole world cannot be reduced to one or another perspective on the world, he insists that the world does seem unified from any particular perspective:

> This world is given to me, from my unique place in Being, as a world that is concrete and unique. For my participative, act-performing consciousness, this world, as an architectonic whole, is arranged around me as the sole centre from which my deed issues or comes forth ... (*TPA*, p.57)

Architectonics, in a sense, is what every individual perspective - perceptual and axiological - shares, what every world-view has in common:

> ... these concretely individual and never repeatable worlds of actual act-performing consciousness (of which, *qua* real components, unitary and once-occurrent Being-as-event comes to be composed) include common moments - *not* in the sense of universal concepts or laws, but in the sense of common moments or constituents in their various concrete architectonics.(*TPA*, p.54)

These common moments, he goes on to say, are the apprehension of the fundamental *relationships* which compose Being: the I-for-myself; the other-for-me; and I-for-the-other. What each individual being must do, is put his or her world together, and appreciate that such a world is but one of an infinite number of architectonic wholes.

More significantly, perhaps, Bakhtin explicitly traces a kind of homology between the architectonics of the actual world and the architectonics of aesthetic activity. He uses what he calls the "world in aesthetic seeing" as a "description of the actual, concrete architectonic of value-governing experiencing of the world"(*TPA*, p.61). The architectonics of aesthetic creation - the authoring of a world, and the reading (seeing) of that world, occur necessarily around a particular value-centre, that of the hero. The particularly objectified quality of aesthetic activity brings its architectonics into high relief, and, furthermore, makes clear that the unity of the world depends upon its relationship to that which is specifically human:

> The unity of the world in aesthetic seeing is not a unity of meaning or sense - not a systematic unity, but a unity that is concretely architectonic: the world is arranged around a concrete value-center, which is seen and loved and thought. What constitutes this center is the human being: everything in this world acquires significance, meaning, and value only in correlation with man - as that which is human.(*TPA*, p.61)

The architectonics of the art work - which are actualized by the author, or by the reader - parallel the architectonics of the actual world:

> Architectonics - as the intuitionally necessary, nonfortuitous disposition and integration of concrete unique parts and moments into a consummated whole - can exist only around a given human being as a hero.(*AA*, p.209)

All human beings, in a sense, are the heroes of their own novel, but, in the actual world, the series of relationships which make up the world are more complex and varied than in the art work. In the art work, the world takes shape in its relation to the hero, but in the actual world architectonics must encompass the consciousness of the possibility of *other* values-centres, relationships can never be closed because, as Bakhtin puts it, the

> highest architectonic principle of the actual world of the performed act or deed is the concrete and architectonically valid or operative contraposition of the *I* and the *other*. Life knows two value-centers that are fundamentally and essentially different, yet are correlated with each other: myself and the other; and

> it is around these centers that all of the concrete moments of Being are distributed and arranged.(*TPA*, p.74)

The relationship between aesthetic architectonics and what we might call cognitive or epistemological architectonics is that the stylized art work highlights the architectonics of the world, which without an awareness of architectonics in general, it is more easy to overlook. Aesthetics is a kind of description of architectonics in general, of which, according to Bakhtin, human beings are epistemologically and ethically obliged to take account.

The notion of architectonics in general and the concomitant homology between aesthetics and Being are particularly significant on two counts. The first is the implications of this early work for Bakhtin's thought in itself. On the one hand, architectonics suggests that Bakhtin's sense of pluralism is "constructive," rather than "deconstructive," his apprehension of plurality leads him towards new unities. In this, Bakhtin's movement of thought is not dissimilar to Vico's development of a "new" science, with a revised notion of truth. The development of these early theoretical figures - answerability and architectonics - is the means whereby Bakhtin seeks to reconcile the pluralities of Being, *within* Being, rather than resorting to abstract theoreticism.[37]

This suggests that Bakhtin, alongside his apprehension of infinite plurality, nonetheless insisted upon the need for unities, even if they are constructed and necessarily inconclusive. Whether this tendency continues into his later work is, once again, a point of contention. Morson and Emerson contend that there is a decisive break. They argue that Bakhtin abandoned these early figures:

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[37]Bakhtin's insistence on participation in Being, as well as suggesting affinities with historical materialism also anticipates one of the key features of contemporary hermeneutics. Gadamer's notion of the "rehabilitation of prejudice" is not dissimilar to Bakhtin's sense of axiology as a determinant of Being; see Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, second, revised edition, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1989), pp.277 ff. There are, of course, important differences between Bakhtin and the the German hermeneut. At this stage of his work, Bakhtin's focus is upon the individual, more like Heidegger or Sartre - especially insofar as Being seems to be a kind of burden - than Gadamer or other contemporary hermeneuts such as Habermas, whose historicist heritage lends their analyses a more sociological element. Later, Bakhtin would begin to draw closer to this approach, particulary in those essays which might be considered literary history, such as "Discourse in the Novel."

> When he discovered dialogue, Bakhtin largely abandoned this model. His early term for the complex of action was *architectonics* ... but this must have seemed too static a metaphor ...[38]

Architectonics, they suggest, not only fails to anticipate dialogue, but is actually fundamentally different, revealing a preference for what they call finalizability, which is antithetical to the concept of *un*finalizability which emerges in Bakhtin's later work and which they characterize as one of his three "global concepts" (the other two being prosaics and dialogue):

> If we compare the idea of the architectonic act with the later (and more familiar) "dialogic word" two differences immediately come into view. First, what is remarkable about the act is its high degree of closure ... In marked contrast to the novelistic *word*, which Bakhtin will come to define as open, unfinalized ... the *act* is valuable as a concrete closed event ...[39]

But the extent to which concrete architectonics implies finalization and, conversely, to which dialogue precludes the concrete, is still debatable. The relationships between "I and the other" have, of course, no determinate content, as Holquist points out, for Bakhtin, "I" is a "shifter" and while it makes possible the concrete, it could be argued that its shifting content precludes any finalization.[40] Similarly, as we shall see, later Bakhtinian figures, such as speech genres and the chronotope, perform a distinctly concretizing function.

As well as suggesting (arguably) a kind of reconciliatory tendency in Bakhtin's method, these early figures can also be seen as foreshadowing some of Bakhtin's later developments.[41] The commingling of aesthetic with epistemological concerns anticipates Bakhtin's later development of

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[38]Morson and Emerson, *Creation of a Prosaics*, p.54.

[39]Morson and Emerson, *Creation of a Prosaics*, p.70. In their table of Bakhtin's career, Morson and Emerson characterize this period as favouring finalization *over* unfinalizability; see p.66.

[40]See Holquist, *Dialogism*, p.23. The idea of the "shifter" is adopted from Roman Jakobson, and indicates a unified concept which has no determinant content. While I always means the same thing, it always indicates a different person, a different architectonic orientation.

[41]This is, again, a contentious point. If they do, as I shall contend, foreshadow later elements of Bakhtin's thought, the continuity thesis is reinforced, but it must be acknowledged that, without specific attention to this problem, my argument cannot claim to be in any way definitive.

his theories of the novel. Bakhtin uses aesthetics, specifically literature, as a kind of focus of these early figures. After his decisive turn towards language he continued to use literature as a focus because it represents a particularly concentrated form of language. The early use of literature might be said to connect with his later use of literature, between which, of course, is his major innovation, the conception of dialogue. Certainly, there are differences: his early work uses a poem in which to explore architectonics, while his later work privileges prose, one of the major shifts in his aesthetic theory. But the persistent use of an aesthetic model - first for architectonics, and then for language - highlights the important congeniality of literature and Being which stands as one of Bakhtin's major presuppositions.

These two questions - the reconciliatory, concretizing aspect of Bakhtin's thought, and the co-extension of literature and life - have, as I have said, another significant resonance, which bears upon the specific concerns of this thesis. The emphasis in architectonics on the concrete world relies upon Bakhtin's sense of a kind of synthetic unity in the world. As we have seen, both Lukács and Auerbach countenance similarly synthetic unities which, particularly in Auerbach's case, emerge from a background of multiplicity (Lukács' dialectic synthesis emerges, of course, only from a duplicity, which greatly limits the relativism of his thought). Not only that, but the possibility of synthetic unity is one of the enabling conditions of realistic representation, upon which Auerbach relies. The constructed world, particularly in aesthetic seeing, which is the result of architectonics is exactly what verisimilitude relies upon, a represented, or *reconstructed*, world.

This relation to realism is reinforced by Bakhtin's correlation of aesthetics and Being. As we have seen, the relation of the world in literature to Being-in-the-world, is synecdochal, the aesthetic world concentrates the properties of the real world. But this sense of aesthetics relies upon a synthetic relationship between literature and the actual world. This, in a sense, is Bakhtin's argument against Formalism. By developing the idea of prosaics as one of Bakhtin's "global concepts,"[42] Morson and Emerson have summarized this tendency in Bakhtin. Not only does prosaics imply

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[42]See particularly, *Creation of a Prosaics*, pp.15ff. Morson and Emerson suggest that this concern with the "prosaic" is not only a matter of aesthetics, but is one of Bakhtin's major philosophical convictions; see p.23.

an aesthetics which privileges prose over verse (reversing the implied bias of the term poetics), but it also, as they suggest, implies a concern with the ordinary and the everyday, as opposed to the unique and extraordinary. Prosaics countenances a parallel between the stuff of aesthetics and the stuff of life, as opposed to defining art *against* life, which, as we have seen, has been a definition which has informed many different aesthetic approaches which oppose realism.[43] A prosaic aesthetic, coupled with architectonics, would seem to countenance realism, which, as we have seen, relies upon a similarly conceived relationship between literature and reality.

These early writings, then, both contribute directly to Bakhtin's relevance to a theory of realism, and go towards establishing what might be understood as his general philosophical principles; his radical insistence on experience, and on differences within experience, and his focus on aesthetics to clarify the workings of Being. Bakhtin's early philosophy, then, is one which seeks a kind of synthetic unity or truth, and for figures which describe this unity. This is what is evoked in the early figures of architectonics and answerability, and the latter has, upon one reading, important linguistic/semantic connotations (Bakhtin does briefly discuss language as a participatory, relational activity), which become Bakhtin's major preoccupation in his later periods.

(c) The development of the dialogic: a critical lexicon

Dialogue, as I have indicated, is Bakhtin's most important concept, and might be understood as a theoretical[44] figure of his conviction, which we have explored, that all human activity is social and relational. In this sense, dialogue is a kind of trope of human existence. But the idea of dialogue also indicates the centrality of language and, consequently, literature in Bakhtin's schema. Because Bakhtin conceives of being as social and relational, language, as the social activity par excellence, is central to his entire philosophical project.

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[43]See Part I of the present study.

[44]The caution with which the term theoretical must be treated has been mentioned already, but a reminder is timely. Without such caution, this description of dialogue as theoretical would constitute a serious misrepresentation.

While the ideas of answerability and architectonics emerge as Bakhtin's contributions to issues of "first philosophy," taking their place within a philosophical context of neo-Kantianism and phenomenology, Bakhtin's sense of the inescapably relational character of human activity - his commitment to practice over theory - required the development of a more complicated and individual approach which refined his sense of the relational into his sense of dialogue. Thus, Bakhtin gradually developed numerous dialogic figures which would guide his inquiries in a range of scholastic fields. These figures constitute a kind of critical armoury and, I shall try to show, each essentially follows the same pattern as was evident in Bakhtin's critical philosophy. Bakhtin proceeds from his sense of the relational, concedes, or rather insists upon, the irreducible multiplicity of possibilities, and then mediates between these possibilities and the need theoretically to limit them through one or another dialogic figure. Most importantly, perhaps, this is clear in Bakhtin's philosophy of language.

For Bakhtin, language, like being (indeed, *very* like being), is relational, and the nature of that relationship is, like answerability, dialogic. Bakhtin's analysis of language aims to unite the idea of language with the function of language. That is, the instance of language which he takes as the focus of his analysis is language in action, speakers in dialogue. Bakhtin develops what has been called meta- or trans-linguistics which is the analysis of language conceived as a dialogue.[45] In his monograph on Dostoevsky, Bakhtin makes clear his sense of the difference between linguistics and his own approach:

> ... we have in mind *discourse*, that is, language in its concrete living totality, and not language as the specific object of linguistics ...
> For what matters here is not the mere presence of specific language styles, social dialects, and so forth, a presence established by purely linguistic criteria; what matters is the *dialogic angle* at which these styles and dialects are juxtaposed or counterposed in the work. Yet this dialogic angle is precisely what cannot be measured by purely linguistic criteria, because dialogic relationships, although belonging to the realm of the

[45]As well as the general introductions cited above, there are several detailed analyses of Bakhtin's theory of language; see Susan Stewart, "Shouts in the Street: Bakhtin's Anti-Linguistics" in Morson ed., *Bakhtin: Essays and Dialogues on His Work*; Holquist, "Answering as Authoring: Mikhail Bakhtin's Trans-Linguistics"; Holquist, "The Politics of Representation".

> *word*, do not belong to the realm of its purely linguistic study.
> Dialogic relationships ... are the subject of metalinguistics.[46]

In conceiving language as dialogue, and developing a method for the study of dialogue, Bakhtin's attention is once again drawn to the relational. Furthermore, Bakhtin's preoccupation with axiology and individual differences, once again, emerges very strongly. Bakhtin characterizes the word - or discourse[47] - as an "ideological sign," by which he means that a word comes forth from its social position, carrying with it a particular set of social relations.[48] Given that the word is social-ideological, Bakhtin/Volosinov says, existing linguistic approaches are inadequate, and he sets out articulating his theory of metalinguistics. Metalinguistics, we can say, is a discipline which mediates between the need to understand language, and the infinite multiplicity of language situations. Again, Bakhtin's method is to proceed from a sense of multiplicity and differences towards theoretical figures which allow this multiplicity to be preserved within a unified concept. In the philosophy of language, the key figure is the utterance.[49]

Bakhtin distinguishes metalinguistics from other philosophical approaches to language by identifying the verbal unit, the utterance, as a social phenomenon. For Bakhtin, language is only language when it is embodied in a dialogue; it cannot be reduced either to a "system of normatively identical forms" or to the "individual psychological or psychophysiological conditions of the speaker"(*MPL*, p.65).[50] A philosophy

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[46]Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp.181-182. All future references to this volume (hereafter *PDP*) will be given in the text.

[47]The Russian word *slovo* means both "word" and "discourse", allowing Bakhtin to utilize the greater resonances of this more charged word to make his case for a relational theory of language.

[48]See V.N. Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, pp.11-12. References to this work (hereafter *MPL*) will be included in the text.

[49]The monograph *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* deals in some detail with the idea of the utterance but the most complete articulation of the importance of the utterance as a "real unit" of language is in "The Problem of Speech Genres" (1952-53) in M.M Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Quotations from essays contained in this volume will be referred to with the abbreviation *SG*, and will be included in the text.

[50]See *MPL*, pp.65ff. and *passim*. This, according to Volosinov/Bakhtin, is the failing of "abstract objectivism" of which the Saussurean privileging of *langue* over *parole* is a pointed example.

of language based upon the utterance, however, avoids these shortcomings: "[t]*he utterance is a social phenomenon*"(*MPL*, p.82).[51]

The utterance, as a dialogic figure, again evinces Bakhtin's mediation between the one and the many. Splitting the utterance into what he calls "theme" and "meaning," Bakhtin implies that the utterance is, at once, stable and universal (the meaning) and specific, contextual, individual (the theme)[52]. In the figure of the speech genre, Bakhtin further develops this mediation, identifying particular ways in which the radical unrepeatability of the utterance is stabilized by communicative conventions.[53]

The utterance, speech genres, and the idea of metalinguistics (translinguistics), then, can be understood as examples of, and as the study of, the dialogics of language, just as answerability was both a way of being and a description of being. The figures of the utterance and speech genres incorporate the experiential, relational basis of all Bakhtin's theory, even as they constitute philosophical categories within which all individual utterances can be grouped. But, again, these categories do not efface or destroy the individuality of the experience of and participation in language. In metalinguistics, we see another way in which Bakhtin, in a sense, revises not merely existing standards, but the very idea of a standard by which to measure philosophical inquiry.

This "revision" of standards points towards another important feature of Bakhtin's critical method. As we have seen, philosophically Bakhtin takes his material to be various kinds of human activity, presupposing a kind of social basis for all his inquiries. Indeed, insofar as Bakhtin's work is polemical, he is concerned to reassert *as* social activities, such as cognition itself, which had been abstracted from experience. We have seen that dialogics, proceeding from this fundamental apprehension, requires a different epistemology, a different linguistics. Generally, Bakhtin's theory requires a revision of its field of inquiry; it must study humanity in practice.

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[51]This is the tendency of "individual subjectivism" to characterize language as the mere expression of individual experience, which is incompatible with Bakhtin's view that experience can never be entirely individual.
[52]See *MPL*, pp.100 ff.
[53]See "The Problem of Speech Genres".

Dialogics, then, concerns the specifically human sciences, recalling his emphasis on the specifically human basis of architectonics. Like Dilthey before him, and many others since, Bakhtin draws a sharp distinction between the human sciences, with which he is concerned, and the natural sciences.[54] Where Bakhtin advances his thought according to this distinction, dialogics can be understood as a hermeneutics. And the material of hermeneutic inquiry, of course, is textual. Bakhtin, like many other theorists whose work proceeds from an analysis of language, asserts that social activity, with which he is concerned, is fundamentally *textual*.

Bakhtin's exposition of what he calls "the problem of the text", makes clear that text, or textuality, is another dialogic figure. Bakhtin's sense of a "text" must be understood within the context of his general critical method and his sense of the dialogic construction of human reality. Like, for example, Derrida, Bakhtin asserts that everything is textual. But where Derrida claims that there is no "outside-text" - with which Bakhtin would agree - such an assertion takes its place alongside Derrida's conception of writing as the space of illimitable differences.[55] Bakhtin, on the other hand, understands the text as dialogic, as containing differences within unity. The play of difference evoked by the notion of radical *écriture* must be distinguished from the relations of dialogue and answerability suggested by Bakhtin.

Bakhtin's unfinished essay on the problem of the text sets out both his apprehension of textuality and his conception of the human sciences:

> The text (written and oral) is the primary given of all ... thought in the human sciences and philosophy in general (including theological and philosophical thought at their sources). The text is the unmediated

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[54]The obvious parallels are, of course, with Gadamer, whose *Truth and Method* is predicated on just such a distinction, and with Dilthey, which parallels are discussed by Todorov; see *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*, chapter two, "Epistemology of the Human Sciences." It would, however, be erroneous to suggest that the distinction is absolute. Holquist, for example, discusses Bakhtin's interest in science, and the relationship between dialogism and various developments in physics - particularly those advanced by Einstein - and in biology; see Holquist, *Dialogism*, pp.20-21.

[55]For an analysis of possible comparisons and contrasts between Derrida and Bakhtin, see Michael Holquist, "The Surd Heard: Bakhtin and Derrida" in Gary Saul Morson ed., *Literature and History: Theoretical Problems and Russian Case Studies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986).

> reality (reality of thought and experience), the only one from which these disciplines and this thought can emerge.(*SG*, p.103)

The primacy of the text, Bakhtin says, necessitates a method which apprehends human reality as textual:

> The human sciences are about man and his specific nature, and not about a voiceless thing or natural phenomenon. Man in his specific human nature always expresses himself (speaks), that is, he creates a text (if only potential). When man is studied outside a text and independent of it, the science is no longer one of the human sciences (human anatomy, physiology, and so forth) ...
> The human act is a potential text and can be understood (as a human act and not a physical action) only in the dialogic context of its time (as a rejoinder, as a semantic position, as a system of motives).(*SG*, p.107)

Bakhtin's assertions may seem like another version of "the world is a text," especially when his extended sense of text - "any coherent complex of signs"(*SG*, p.103) - is considered. Additionally, his emphasis on understanding, or comprehension, over against explanation[56], resembles the Diltheyan hermeneutic project to revise the very idea of knowledge in the human sciences. But the text, or, rather, Bakhtin's idea of the text, like all dialogic figures, indeed like all dialogue and discourse, comprises both multiplicity and specificity. The text, Bakhtin says, is an utterance, not a thing, and like all utterances, it is at once individual and trans-individual. Bakhtin's text has, in his terms, two poles. The first is the language system which generates the meaning of the utterance; the second is the unique performance of the utterance, which generates its concrete, practical theme. This simultaneous duality of the text is well-noted by Bakhtin:

> And so behind each text stands a language system. Everything in the text that is repeated and reproduced, everything repeatable and reproducible, everything that can be given outside a given text (the given) conforms to this language system. But at the same time each text (as an utterance) is individual, unique, and unrepeatable ... (*SG*, p.105)

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[56]See, for example, *SG* p.111, where Bakhtin says that explanation cannot be dialogic, whereas understanding is always dialogic.

A dialogic approach to the text, according to Bakhtin, must negotiate between these two poles, must preserve the individuality of any text, as well as appreciate its more stable qualities; generic boundaries, language systems, grammar, syntax, and so forth.

Bakhtin works in many different fields of inquiry and develops a series of figures which he uses to focus his thoughts in each field. In a sense, Bakhtin devises a kind of critical lexicon, developing, adapting, and inventing terms, such as text, chronotope, architectonics, and so forth, which express the ambivalence and complexities of his ideas. In so doing, Bakhtin can be understood as having left behind not a doctrine but rather a series of meditations upon a well-known problem. In this short analysis of some of Bakhtin's most common figures, I have tried to show that these meditations follow a common pattern. On the one hand, Bakhtin perceives, feels, and hears the infinite possibilities of Being. On the other, he is unwilling, indeed unable, to resign Being to absolute relativism. He is deeply skeptical of what he calls theoreticism, favouring an immersion in the practical world, but in many ways Bakhtin's project is to arrive at a theoretical description of that world. These contrapuntal inclinations filter through into each dialogic figure, each of which similarly tries to represent, simultaneously, the one and the many.

I have not yet discussed Bakhtin's literary theory in any detail, except to have noted his turn to literature as a kind of model for his thought. Literature, however, is particularly important: firstly, the present study is about literature, and, secondly, Bakhtin's thought, as we have seen, fundamentally revolves around literature. But literature is a special case, both for Bakhtin and for this inquiry. With the sense of dialogue outlined above in place, it is now possible to turn more directly to Bakhtin's literary theory, and to the possibility of a dialogic theory of realistic representation.

(d) The special case of literature: Bakhtin and the novel

The importance of literature for Bakhtin cannot be overemphasized. Throughout his investigations he turned to literature and to writers to substantiate his claims regarding the dialogic quality of Being. In Bakhtin's early philosophical work literature is a kind of paradigm for being.

Concerned with relations between self and other, Bakhtin turns to the relationship between an author and a hero as an exemplary case of the way in which dialogic perception reaches some sort of objective stability. Holquist discusses the correlation between literature and dialogic Being, suggesting that literature, or rather literary authorship, is analogous to participation in answerable interhuman relations:

> literature is important because it gives the most rigorous on-the-job training for a work we must all as men do, the work of answering and authoring the text of our social and physical universe.[57]

The transgredient position of the author with regard to the hero, indeed to the whole work of literature, makes possible an analysis of the problems of relations between self and other. The various ways in which literature is determined by the author's consciousness elucidate various ways of constructing - architectonically - the relationship between humans. We can see, then, that Bakhtin conceives of aesthetics as constructive activity, and, as such, as a particularly condensed example of dialogic architectonics. In this, especially when he writes of "aesthetic self-activity"(*AA*, p.41), Bakhtin's ideas seem to resemble similar ideas proposed by Michel Foucault[58]. But where Foucault's sense of aesthetic self-creation proceeds from a kind of ethos of resistance to the agglomeration of social forces at work on one's subjectivity, Bakhtin is, as always, concerned to come to terms both with the fragmentary and the whole. It is the *prima facie* "wholeness" of literature which prompts Bakhtin's investigation:

> What makes a reaction specifically aesthetic is precisely the fact that it is a reaction to the *whole* of the hero as a human being, a reaction that assembles all of the cognitive-ethical determinations and valuations of the hero and consummates them in the form of a unitary and unique whole that is a concrete, intuitable whole, but also a whole of meaning.(*AA*, p.5)

A reaction to the world is, according to Bakhtin, a similar process of consummation and determination. But these wholes, the hero, the world,

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[57]Holquist, "Answering as Authoring", p.318.

[58]On similarities between Bakhtin and Foucault, see David Patterson, *Literature and Spirit: Essays on Bakhtin and his Contemporaries* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1988).

are wholes of meaning, and meaning, as we have seen, is constructed. Or, rather, it is dialogic, its unity proceeds from its multiplicity.

But beyond conflating Being with aesthetics, Bakhtin also investigated aesthetic production itself, an aspect of his scholarship which, as well as advancing his general philosophical claims, also contributed certain dialogic figures to literary theory. These are the ideas of polyphony, heteroglossia, the chronotope, and the novel. It is in his long monograph on Dostoevsky where Bakhtin begins to set out both his literary preferences and the philosophical basis of these preferences.

Dostoevsky's importance is immediately clear. Bakhtin attributes to Dostoevsky the creation of "a completely new type of artistic thinking ... provisionally called *polyphonic*"(*PDP*, p.3). For Bakhtin, the idea of polyphony means the presence, within a text, of fully realized voices. Which is to say, recalling the idea of aesthetic consummation discussed above, that the author allows each semantic centre of consciousness fully to develop without objectifying it. Generally, what Bakhtin is saying is that Dostoevsky allows his heroes a life of their own, but there is more to this than merely a preference for "rounded" over "flat" characters in a novel. It is rather, Bakhtin says, that by sacrificing semantic authority, Dostoevsky achieves a dialogic orientation to the world, an orientation which refrains from objectifying the world or overprivileging one's own semantic position:

> what unfolds before Dostoevsky is not a world of objects, illuminated and ordered by his monologic thought, but a world of consciousnesses mutually illuminating one another, a world of yoked-together semantic human orientations.(*PDP*, p.97)

In sum, Bakhtin attributes to Dostoevsky a dialogic approach to the world which then takes shape in, or rather gives shape to, his poetic, or, as Morson and Emerson suggest, his prosaic, forms. What Bakhtin calls Dostoevsky's polyphonic novel embodies a dialogue of voices, each of which, according to Bakhtin's philosophy of language, calls forth a particular semantic position. This dialogue is, Bakhtin says, unfinalizable, representing a view of the world which is similarly contingent and dialogic. Bakhtin quotes Dostoevsky to support his philosophical claims:

> "Reality in its entirety," Dostoevsky himself wrote, "is not to be exhausted by what is immediately at hand, for an overwhelming part of this reality is contained in the form of a still *latent, unuttered future Word.*"(*PDP*, p.90)

But alongside Dostoevsky's appreciation of and respect for different semantic positions and alongside the double-voicedness of Dostoevsky's discourse, we can again see Bakhtin's attempts to theorize these conditions of plurality. The very figure of polyphony itself embraces this duality within Bakhtin's thought:

> The essence of polyphony lies precisely in the fact that the voices remain independent and, as such, are combined in a unity of a higher order than in homophony.(*PDP*, p.21)

Polyphony and dialogic discourse - which, incidentally can exist in the very smallest utterance, a single word[59] - then, are ideas which encompass the infinite differences which are possible in human reality. As the above quote suggests, polyphony *is* a unity, but a special kind of unity which embraces multiplicity. Bakhtin, despite his rigorous and relentless critique of monologue, of oppressive discourses, and of too-quickly arrived at definitions, is nonetheless concerned with unity and with truth. But the kind of truth which he learns from Dostoevsky, like all dialogic ideas, "can only be the subject of a living vision, not of abstract understanding"(*PDP*, p.153).

Dialogic aesthetics - of which Dostoevsky, according to Bakhtin, is among the most influential representatives - also find strong expression in Bakhtin's theory of the novel. Indeed, the novel emerges as one of Bakhtin's most important theoretical categories, reinforcing the correlation between literature and Being in Bakhtin's thought. Like Lukács, Bakhtin seized upon the novel as the occasion for philosophical investigation, but where Lukács placed the novel in a dialectical historical context, Bakhtin seems to value "novelness" as a literary-philosophical quality which corresponds to a dialogic philosophy.[60]

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[59]See *PDP*, p.184. For a more detailed exposition, see *MPL*, p.103.

[60]The relationship between Lukács' theory of the novel and Bakhtin's has, of course, been commented on by many critics. See, for example, Michel Aucouturier, "The Theory of the Novel in Russia in the 1930s: Lukács and Bakhtin" in John Garrard ed., *The Russian Novel*

The novel, as Bakhtin describes it, has a very close relationship with the dialogic nature of reality which he is so keen to reveal:

> The novel is not merely one genre among other genres. Among genres long since completed and in part already dead, the novel is the only developing genre. It is the only genre that was born and nourished in a new era of world history and therefore it is deeply akin to that era ...[61]

The novel, according to Bakhtin, is a genre of unfinalizability, which concords with a dialogic epistemology which, while utilizing permanent categories, is similarly inconclusive. Bakhtin, then, argues that there is a correspondence between the literary historical emergence of the novel as a genre, and the development of polyglot societies. Such an idea is very similar to Lukács' contrast between the epic and the novel, and Auerbach's history of what he (Auerbach) called the separation of styles. But Bakhtin, as I have said, is interested in novelness, which is not to be identified in novels as such, but in particular aesthetic attitudes and forms. As he traces the history of polyglossia Bakhtin seems once again to be identifying aesthetic tendencies to implement the kind of tensile, contingent unity which characterizes his own dialogic figures. This is the importance of the novel for Bakhtin: it is the literary form which best represents his own theoretical and philosophical concern to come up with figures and forms which reconcile multiplicity and unity.

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from Pushkin to Pasternak (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983); Holquist, *Dialogism*, pp.73ff.; Ken Hirschkop, Introduction: Bakhtin and cultural theory" in Ken Hirshkop and David Shepherd eds., *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory* , p.33; Graham Pechey, "On the borders of Bakhtin: dialogisation, decolonisation" in *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory*, p.55-57.

The general view of the similarities between Bakhtin and Lukács is that while both saw the novel as a philosophically important genre, they differed fundamentally insofar as Lukács lamented the loss of spiritual unity which the novel heralded while Bakhtin embraced the resulting possibilities of difference and dialogue; see Clark and Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, p.288. According to Clark and Holquist, Bakhtin had begun a translation of Lukács' *Theory* in 1924 and Bakhtin's theory of the novel is an implicit response not only to *The Theory of the Novel* but also to official theories of the novel which were largely guided by the now-Marxist Lukács who, resident in Moscow during the 1930s, was extremely influential in Soviet literary studies; see Clark and Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, p.271.

[61]Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p.4. Hereafter *DI*, with page references included in the text.

In "Discourse in the Novel" Bakhtin introduces the figure of heteroglossia to advance his theory of the novel. Heteroglossia - which obviously has much in common with polyglossia - is essentially a social phenomenon. Speech types, which correspond to various social conventions, are commingled in the novel, and the essence of the novel is that these speech types, each of which represents a verbal-ideological world-view, is, by virtue of being placed into a dialogic context with other world-views, stripped of its unitary privilege. In other words, the truth claim of any particular view in a novel is undermined. Bakhtin describes literary history as a dialogue between literary forms which suppress the possibilities of this kind of dialogue and those which emerge from it. Like Auerbach's, Bakhtin's criteria for distinguishing between these two lines of development are stylistic. Bakhtin identifies various stylistic forms which introduce heteroglossia, including the speech of characters, the incorporation of other generic forms, and particular character types. The specifics of these stylistic techniques are less important than Bakhtin's conviction that heteroglossia, which dialogizes the novel, is the generic task of the novel. Heteroglossia is not only the defining characteristic of the novel, it is the philosophical responsibility of the novel.

The heteroglot novel, then, is the most complete aesthetic expression of dialogic philosophy, and a tension between the one and the many is once again evident. Bakhtin's sense of multiplicity, and of the philosophical importance of respecting multiplicity, is clear:

> The novel is the expression of a Galilean perception of language, one that denies the absolutism of a single and unitary language - that is, that refuses to acknowledge its own language as the sole verbal and semantic center of the ideological world. It is a perception that has been made conscious of the vast plenitude of national and, more to the point, social languages - all of which are equally capable of being "languages of truth," but, since such is the case, all of which are equally relative, reified and limited, as they are merely the language of social groups, professions and other cross-sections of everyday life.(*DI*, p.367)

The novel, then, takes its place in Bakhtin's critical lexicon as an extension of the utterance. As an utterance, it makes certain claims, but as a dialogic form, it simultaneously reveals the limits of these claims. It is, Bakhtin

says, fundamentally "auto-critical." But the apprehension of multiplicity which characterizes heteroglossia, and dialogism in general, is not a resignation to multiplicity. Once again Bakhtin seems to have in mind a kind of arduous mediation between the one and the many:

> Languages of heteroglossia, like mirrors that face each other, each reflecting in its own way a piece, a tiny corner of the world, *force us to guess and to grasp for a world* behind their mutually reflecting aspects that is broader, more multi-leveled, containing more and varied horizons than would be available to a single language or a single mirror.(*DI*, pp.414-415, emph. mine)

Here we see Bakhtin's demand that we not only get beyond our own unitary language and perception but that we try to contemplate the whole range of the dialogue; ourselves, the others, and the unity of ourselves and others. Indeed, the novel, deriving from an apprehension of inconclusiveness, displays a demand for formal closure which is, according to Bakhtin, evidence of the novel's inconclusiveness:

> The absence of internal conclusiveness and exhaustiveness creates a sharp increase in demands for an *external* and *formal* completedness and exhaustiveness, especially in regard to plot line. The problems of a beginning, an end, and "fullness" of plot are posed anew.(*DI*, p.31)

Once again, the contrapuntal tendencies of dialogic thought are evident; the demand for closure springs from a sense of openness.

The characterization of the novel as dialogic does not, however, mean that all novels are necessarily dialogic. As we have seen, Bakhtin is ready to characterize as novels forms and works which are not usually so understood. Rather, Bakhtin's idea of the novel can be understood as an aesthetic consolidation of Bakhtin's philosophical principles which can occur in a variety of literary forms. The novel, then, is a form which embodies a complex tension between the unifying and diversifying impulses which characterize all dialogic thought.

(e) Dialogics and the problem of realism

The ambition of the realistic novel - to represent a section of social and historical reality - poses, I suggest, an interesting problem for dialogic thought. Bakhtin's simultaneous concern with multiplicity and unity suggests a kind of paradoxical approach to realism. Bakhtin's embrace of differences would seem to be antithetical to realism's claim to verisimilitude. Certainly his theory of carnival would suggest that this might be the case, as would the emphasis on the interiority of the hero and on parody and satire as means of introducing heteroglossia into the novel. Indeed, at one point Bakhtin says as much:

> Realism frequently reifies man, but this is not an approach to him. Naturalism, with its tendency towards a causal explanation of man's acts and thoughts (his semantic position in the world) reifies man even more.(*SG*, p.112)

Clearly, Bakhtin is opposed to reductive accounts of Being. His approach is relentlessly critical, always concerned to undermine the self-evidence and self-sufficiency of scholastic approaches, of philosophical propositions, and of representations.

However, as we have seen, each of Bakhtin's theoretical figures is a device which allows him to contemplate the unity of the differences which he perceives, or rather hears. Furthermore, Bakhtin also holds to a view of the novel as ineluctably tied to social reality. Among what he calls the basic characteristics of the novel, Bakhtin includes the capacity of the novel to make contact with reality when he speaks of

> the new zone opened by the novel for structuring literary images, namely, the zone of maximal contact with the present (with contemporary reality) in all its openendedness.(*DI*, p.11)

Again, Bakhtin's dialogic approach straddles these seemingly exclusive tendencies. The novel, as Bakhtin understands it, is representational but, at the same time, it abdicates the authority of its own representational properties. This is argued by Ann Jefferson who suggests that dialogism is interdependent with what she calls the "will to reference" in Bakhtin's theory of discourse, locating Bakhtin somewhere between the theories

advanced by Ian Watt on the one hand, and Roland Barthes, on the other. She concludes by claiming that dialogism is a productive advance upon theoretical discussions of realism and referentiality:

> Dialogism and the concept of a will to reference might offer ways of linking the post-modernist text to the real from which its own theoretical polemic has severed it; but, equally, the reassessment of referentiality opens the way to more problematising and radical readings of realist texts but without necessarily destroying the mimesis which has always tied them to the real.[62]

My argument is in agreement with Jefferson on this. Bakhtin's reluctance to resign heteroglossia to absolute relativism does suggest a strong interrelationship between reference and dialogism. Moreover, what Jefferson calls reference - the relationship between an utterance and an object - to which we might add all sorts of ideas with which Bakhtin is concerned - perception, meaning, representation - is, in Bakhtin's schema, *unavoidable*. As we have seen, for Bakhtin, any form of disembodied knowledge is no form of knowledge at all. We are bound to understand things from our point of view simply because point of view, as a cognitive limit, is not merely a means of comprehension but is comprehension itself. In articulating his various theories of dialogue, Bakhtin is not dispensing with reference, but rather revising its conditions and emphasizing its limitations. The theoretical achievement of dialogics is to reconcile determinate, practical knowledge with its own shortcomings.

We can understand realistic representation, then, as a special kind of utterance. Or, rather, representation can be developed as another dialogic figure. In representation we have a statement to the effect that this or that novel is a realistic representation of this or that social and historical reality. Like all utterances, however, the realistic novel is riven with its own internal dialogic relationships, and the reality which it purports to represent is also, Bakhtin would say, dialogically charged:

> Indeed, any concrete discourse (utterance) finds the object at which it was directed already as it were overlain with qualifications, open to dispute, charged

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[62]Ann Jefferson, "Realism Reconsidered: Bakhtin's Dialogism and the "Will to Reference" *Australian Journal of French Studies* ,23, 2 (1986), p.183.

> with value, already enveloped in an obscuring mist - or, on the contrary, by the "light" of alien words that have already been spoken about it. It is entangled, shot through with shared thoughts, points of view, alien value judgments and accents. The word, directed toward its object, enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment ... (*DI*, p.276)

None of this, however, displaces the representational validity of a novel, it merely deprivileges or qualifies it. Indeed, the realization of the heteroglot nature of a novel is dependent upon its representational validity because, without the reader assuming a concrete position, the dialogue has nowhere to begin.

Of particular importance to a dialogic theory of realistic representation is Bakhtin's figure of the chronotope, through which he charts the spatial and temporal representations of literature. Bakhtin's preoccupation with time and space - which reveals his Kantian heritage - again follows the general pattern of dialogic thought. Time and space are, at once, permanent philosophical categories and singular, unrepeatable moments of experience. To reconcile these two senses of time and space, Bakhtin develops the idea of the chronotope, which is a shifting[63] category of time-space organization in literature.

The surviving fragment of what was to have been a history of realism provides a demonstration of Bakhtin's method of chronotopical analysis.[64] Predominantly concerned with Goethe, Bakhtin proposes a typology of subgenres of the novel, to be distinguished by their integration of time and space. Identifying different time-space patterns Bakhtin discusses what he calls the travel novel, the novel of ordeal and the biographical novel, measuring their time-space organization against his understanding of real historical time. His analysis of these literary types is similar to Auerbach's, whose analysis, as we have seen, proceeds from a similar distinction between the Homeric and Biblical modes of representation.

Bakhtin's "historical typology" reaches an important point when he comes to analyse the *Bildungsroman*. The importance of the representational

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[63]"Shifting" is used here in the sense discussed above in relation to the "I"; see footnote 41 above.

[64]See Holquist, "Introduction", in *Speech Genres*, p.xiii and p.xxii, n.8.

practices of this mode - the fragment is titled "The *Bildungsroman* and its Significance in the Development of Realism" - is clear from the way in which Bakhtin introduces what he calls the "problem" of the *Bildungsroman*:

> The main theme of our essay is the time-space and the image of man in the novel. Our criterion is the assimilation of real historical time and the assimilation of historical man that takes place in that time. This problem is mainly theoretical and literary in nature, but no theoretical problem can be resolved without concrete historical material. Moreover, this problem as such is too broad, and it must be delimited somewhat in both its theoretical and historical aspects. Hence our more specific and special theme - the image of *man in the process of becoming* in the novel.(*SG*, p.19)

Bakhtin's terminology here recalls the Hegelian influences in Auerbach and Lukács. The idea of *becoming*, to which Bakhtin returns several times, implies a historicist epistemology which, rather than seeing the nature of human being and the relationship between humans and the world as static understands them as fundamentally historical. Bakhtin explores this mode of representation in Goethe's "novels of apprenticeship" arguing that the "type" of novel represented by Goethe represents heroes within their historicity:

> He emerges *along with the world* and he reflects the historical emergence of the world itself.(*SG*, p.23)[65]

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[65]The *Bildungsroman* and many of the other genres discussed by Bakhtin involve, of course, hero figures, and Bakhtin focuses a great deal of attention on the hero, in this essay, and in many others, most notably "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity", which appears in *Art and Answerability*. This feature of Bakhtin's work derives, perhaps, from his critical expertise and preferences. Ancient literature is predominantly heroic, and the works of Goethe, Dickens and Dostoevsky - some of the modern authors discussed by Bakhtin - often feature "heroic" figures. In making use of Bakhtin's thought, however, I have taken the view that singular heroes - in the Odysseus or Prince Myshkin mould - are not absolutely necessary and I suggest that two possible reasons for the emphasis on the hero may be adduced. The first is that the figure of the hero and the hero's activity are vehicles for the analysis of the assimilation of time and space. This is suggested by the essay on the chronotope and by the fragment of the Bildungsroman essay. The second reason, suggested mainly by the "Author and Hero" essay is that the relationship between author and hero is a particularly pregnant manifestation of the fundamentally relational quality of Being, and as such, provides material via which Bakthin can articulate his wider philosophical claims.

This analysis of realism in terms of the "essential *becoming*" of human experience suggests that dialogism is a kind of historicism. Realistic representation, such a theory might run, is realistic because it - as is the case with Goethe - assimilates real historical time and space.[66]

Time and space are given more detailed treatment in another essay from the same period which commits very similar textual analyses to those of the *Bildungsroman* essay to the development of one of Bakhtin's most important theoretical figures: the chronotope. As a theoretical figure, the chronotope allows Bakhtin to pursue the study of time and space in literary works. Once again, the importance of time and space indicates Bakhtin's Kantian background although, as a note to the essay makes clear, while time and space, for Kant, were transcendental elements designed to get beyond the vagaries of experience, Bakhtin sought, as it were, to relocate time and space *in* experience as "forms of the most immediate reality"(*DI*, p.85, n.2).[67]

As he develops the idea of the chronotope, a number of important features of Bakhtin's literary theory become clear. Bakhtin's literary theory, as his almost exclusive interest in the novel makes obvious, is a theory of narrative. The narrative structure of literary texts is the occasion of his analysis but the complexities of narrative and the correlation between narrative and human experience develop what might be understood as a poetics into a more ambitious literary philosophy. The chronotope figures

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[66]See *SG*, p.20. Bakhtin's distinction between, on the one hand, adventure time-space and ordeal time-space, and, on the other, historical becoming is very similar to the criterion by which, in *Mimesis*, Auerbach distringuishes between realism and its various historical antitheses. Citing this Bakhtin piece, Todorov, for these reasons, points out the convergence of the two thinkers' work; see Todorov, *The Dialogical Principle*, p.77. This essay also reinforces some of the similarities between Bakhtin and Lukács, particularly insofar as Goethe joins Dostoevsky as one of the authors through whom theoretical claims are advanced.

[67]As I have already mentioned,Clark and Holquist have comprehensively discussed Bakhtin's relationship with Kant and with Neo-Kantianism; see note 26 above. The way in which Bakhtin distinguishes his own sense of time and space from that of Kant might be understood as a general model of his assimilation of Kant's thought and Neo-Kantianism. Beginning with a Kantian or Neo-Kantian problem - time and space, ethics and the philosophical centrality of ethics, philosophy and faith - Bakhtin seemed to be sympathetic to the idealistic imperatives implicit in these problems but would then "stand Kant on his head," trying to reconcile the problems without resorting to the transcendence of experience. Introducing Bakhtin's difficult early notes on ethics, Holquist described Bakhtin as attempting to "detranscendentalize Kant"; see Michael Holquist, "Foreword", in Bakhtin, *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, ed. p.ix.

prominently in this aspect of Bakhtin's thought. The original material on the chronotope offers this definition:

> In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope.(*DI*, p.84)

It is through the chronotope, then, that the narrative is developed. Bakhtin identifies various historical manifestations of time-space organization; adventure chronotopes, biographical chronotopes, the chronotope of the family. Bakhtin's discussion is wide-ranging, not only in its broad range of references, but also conceptually. Chronotopes seem, at times, to be typical plots, such as the adventure or ordeal tale. At other times they are social units, such as the family, or events, such as the ritual funeral known as an encomium. At still others, characters seem to serve as chronotopic devices; servants, rogues, and thieves, who highlight the division of space into public and private spheres.

As Bakhtin's historical typology continues, he comes to what we might understand as more sophisticated chronotopes. The complexities of the chronotopes which Bakhtin identifies in Rabelais', and the image of the carnival, are discussed in detail, Bakhtin arguing that the increasing potential for instability bespeaks a greater assimilation of actual diversities in existence. In the conclusion, written in 1973, Bakhtin identifies several chronotopes with more exactitude than is evident in the earlier part of this essay. Discussing several nineteenth-century novelists, Bakhtin suggests that roads, castles, parlours and salons, towns and, more abstractly, thresholds, serve as literary devices which shape the narrative. More importantly, these chronotopes organize the narrative because they are real chronotopes, real figures within which social and historical reality takes shape.

Bakhtin emphasizes the representational significance of the chronotope towards the end of the essay:

> They are the organizing centers for the fundamental narrative events of the novel. The chronotope is the place where the knots of narrative are tied and untied. It can be said without qualification that to them belongs the meaning that shapes narrative.
> We cannot help but be strongly impressed by the *representational* importance of the chronotope. Time becomes, in effect, palpable and visible, the chronotope makes narrative events concrete, makes them take on flesh, causes blood to flow in their veins.(*DI*, p.250)

Chronotopes, then, might be understood as the hubs of the narrative, and the complexity of these hubs, the extent to which they represent real time-space organization might then be advanced into a chronotopic theory of realistic representation. The chronotope doesn't suggest an empirical correspondence between the world and the text, nor does it simplify or naturalize the textuality of literature. Rather, it represents reality as similarly chronotopic, and the increasing assimilation of historical time through literary chronotopes increases the verisimilitude of the literary text.

The essay on the *Bildungsroman* and parts of the essay on the chronotope seem to work towards just such a theory of realistic representation. Bakhtin asserts the non-identity of the real world and the represented world. Readers and authors, he says:

> are all located in a real, unitary and as yet incomplete historical world set off by a sharp categorical boundary from the *represented* world in the text.(*DI*, p.253)

But these worlds, too, are chronotopic, which makes possible a dialogue between chronotopes:

> Out of the actual chronotopes of our world (which serve as the source of representation) emerge the reflected and *created* chronotopes of the world represented in the work (in the text).(*DI*, p.253)

Representation, then, is a dialogue between the chronotopic situation of the reader, and the chronotopes of the text, a formulation which, again, parallels the historicism of Lukács and Auerbach which attributes the representational properties of a text to the extent that they assimilate the

essentially historical nature of reality. Bakhtin claims that this kind of representational relationship - a dialogue of chronotopes - makes possible a theory of realism which avoids basing itself upon a simple correspondence:

> As we have already said, there is a sharp and categorical boundary line between the actual world as a source of representation and the world represented in the work. We must never forget this, we must never confuse - as has been done up to now and as is still often done - the *represented* world with the world outside the text (naive realism) ... But it is also impermissible to take this categorical boundary line as something absolute and impermeable ... (*DI*, p.253)

The inherent tension of dialogic literary theory in general and the chronotope in particular is very evident in these passages. A simple correspondence between the represented world and the actual world is ruled out, because it fails to take account of the different realms, and acts, essentially, to *close* the real world. But at the same time, Bakhtin has once again used aesthetics as a kind of model for a general philosophical claim, which means that while the represented and real worlds must not be identified with one another, they are still conceptually parallel.

The chronotopes of the text, because of their peculiarly concentrated form, highlight the quasi-narrative qualities of the real world. Because the reader is necessarily *outside* the chronotopes of the text their status as organizing principles is more easily appreciated. They can act, then, as a conceptual tool which, by alerting readers to the importance of time-space organization, reveals the similarly chronotopic organization which makes the real world concrete. This is a typically Bakhtinian use of aesthetics to bring a philosophical issue into high relief, a manoeuvre which recalls a similar turn to aesthetics in his earlier work.

To facilitate this interaction between the real and created chronotopes, Bakhtin suggests another chronotope, a *creative* chronotope within which the contact between the world of the text and the real world takes place, which makes possible a representational dialogue. In the peculiar time-space of reading, of entering and so creating the chronotopes of the text, the reader bridges the gap between the explicitly chronotopic structure of the text and the implicitly chronotopic structure of the real world, bringing

the real world into the text and applying a kind of chronotopic analysis to the real world. The different realms, then, are interrelated, which doesn't simplify or reduce the relationship between them, but does bring them into contact with one another.

It would, perhaps, be possible at this stage to advance what might be called a chronotopic theory of realism, which would perhaps have found expression had the monograph on realism taken its place in a fuller history of realism. Such a theory would suggest that realism depends upon the extent to which time and space were realistically assimilated in the chronotopes of the text; that is, the extent to which the text employed the same organizing principles as the social and historical world. An adventure hero, for example, organizes time and space in a manner which is patently unrealistic because it fails to take account of historical development. By demonstrating that concrete elements of a text - a town, a school, a battlefield - are not merely reflected but are important constructed conjunctural points, a text would represent the way in which social and historical reality is similarly organized through chronotopes. Such an approach would seem effectively to refute the suggestion that realistic representation relies upon impossible standards of objectivity.

But it is clear, even from this short discussion, that the chronotope is a problematic idea, and the problematic nature of the chronotope might more profitably be considered in the development of a theory of realism based upon Bakhtinian thought. As Holquist points out, the chronotope is at once very important for Bakhtin and a very slippery concept, and part of the problem is that the chronotope is implicated as both a figure of historicity, and as a poetic figure, which, Holquist says, seems to imply an impossible contradiction.[68] But this kind of contradiction, as we have seen, is a feature of all dialogic figures, and, essentially, is the motivation for all of Bakhtin's thought; dialogics is a theory of the one and the many.

A dialogic analysis of realistic representation then would take account of both the validity of representational claims and the limits of such claims. As an utterance, the realistic novel is directed towards its object - reality - but it cannot claim to be an authoritative representation. The

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[68]See Holquist, *Dialogism*, pp.108-114. The "problem," as it were, of the chronotope is discussed at some length within the context of the general problem of the historical and the poetic in Bakhtin's work.

verisimilitude of the representation depends not upon absolute truth nor upon the kind of ideological or linguistic naivety which has been implicated, but upon the contingent organizational means through which dialogics achieves a sense of unity. Historical and geographical boundaries, for example, are generic stabilizers which delimit human experience. The realistic novel achieves its verisimilitude by including discourses of history and geography into its heteroglot structure and by limiting its time and space within these generic boundaries. Thus, a novel like *Gulliver's Travels*, while representational, includes organizational figures which do not conform to the genres which customarily organize experience, and is not, therefore, realistic. At least, that is, it is not entirely realistic in the terms of this study. Some of the organizing features of *Gulliver's Travels*, such as the idea of government, do allow for a continuity between these features as chronotopes and the organization of the social and historical world. However, other chronotopes, such as the islands, confound the organization of the real world, and thus the representational significance of the novel is changed.

Dialogic theory, then, takes the *prima facie* achievements of realistic representation and then looks beyond them. It complements the historicist theses advanced by Lukács and by Auerbach by developing an approach which is based on language which contemplates a complex array of social situations which contribute to the tensile quality of realism. In a sense, while Auerbach held to Vico's extended understanding of history as extending to the whole of social life, Bakhtin takes up this extension with a vengeance. For Bakhtin, the world is a social situation, a dialogue. Literature, too, is a dialogue, of characters and environments, of time and space. In the dialogue between the two there is space for a theory of realism which embraces these convictions.

- 7 -

Towards a critical realism

> ... I am always secretly aware that there are other things in the world besides me.
>
> - Maurice Merleau-Ponty

In the opening lines of *War and Peace*, we, as readers, are abruptly introduced to the world of the St Petersburg aristocracy. Anna Pávlovna, if not quite in mid-sentence, certainly greets Kuragin, whose arrival occasions our presence at these events, as if she were in the middle of an ongoing conversation. The matter of her speech, the spectacular rise of Napoleon, prefigures some of the most important events and concerns of the whole novel, and some of the novel's most outstanding representational achievements.

As this scene gradually unfolds, the deep background to this conversation gradually emerges: the date is mentioned; the occasion for the meeting detailed; Anna Pávlovna's dedication to fashionable Petersburg habits alluded to; Kuragin's reserved manner described. Each of these evoke further depths of background: the persuasiveness, even oppressiveness, of social custom in the era; the transitional phase of Russian culture and society; the function of languages in a polyglot society; the imaginary but tangible demarcation between Petersburg and Moscow; the looming shadow of the French incursions which will touch Kuragin's family, and indeed the whole social structure of which he is a part.

This opening is typically realistic: the social and historical milieu pervades the fictional action, and, in return, the fictional action provides a conduit through which readers are presented with a "picture of the age." But the hermeneutic structure of this seemingly very simple episode is highly complex, although this complexity is belied by the accessibility of the representational dimension of the text.

In the first place, for example, we arrive at the scene through Kuragin's arrival, it is only through him that any of this becomes available. His

arrival and the long standing relationship between him and Anna Pávlovna in turn encourages her forthright references to the pressing questions of the day. His easy response to her unconventional greeting takes us then slightly outside him, allowing the narrator to reflect upon Kuragin and his particular situation. As readers, then, we are required to adopt and adapt to a variety of interpretive purviews. At first, we depend upon characters for access to the environment, upon Kuragin to bring us to Anna Pávlovna's, and upon their relationship to introduce important historical details. But then our dependence upon the characters recedes, and, rather than the prism through which the social environment is represented, they become features of that environment.

The interpretive shifts which emerge upon a close analysis of a scene like this are often almost imperceptible, but they are vital. Reading a scene like this, and by extrapolation a novel like *War and Peace* is a dynamic interpretive process, initiated by a dynamic text which embodies a great variety of strategies and techniques. Through their complexity, these techniques are strong evidence of the critical and technically and philosophically problematic concepts which inform literary realism. I shall not here discuss *War and Peace* any further. My aim has been only to introduce briefly the kind of interpretive situation which is involved in realism, to suggest that it is a particularly concentrated amalgamation of some of the critical issues which preoccupy literary studies.

More particularly, I shall try to show that this situation, and all the issues which it involves, are fundamentally critical. Rather than being an example of the wilful simplicity often attributed to literary realism, the opening of this novel is a good illustration of how realism is particularly critical. The synthesis of the reader's perspective and Kuragin's, which gradually gives way to a a kind of tension between his perspective and that of the narrator, for example, immediately introduces a kind of phenomenological reflection on subjectivity. We know what Kuragin knows, but we also know far less, and at the same time far more. Our experience of this short episode is so mixed as to encourage a meditation upon the problems and possibilities of experience. The simple categories of subject and object, of representational and represented, cannot adequately describe the subtle processes which this representation involves.

We might, then, in a number of senses, call this situation critical. The subtle irony of the narrator's description of Kuragin, for example, evinces one of the most salient features of most ideas of realism. This is the general tendency for realism to be critical, in the ordinary sense, of reality. In the introduction to his anthology of examples and descriptions of modern literary realism, G.J. Becker recounts an exchange between Gorky and Tolstoy in which the older man reluctantly reconciles himself to the representation, in the service of greater realism, of such uncomfortable spectacles as drunken women.[1] Becker suggests that realism is motivated by an assumption that the kind of existence of the greatest number of people is the most "real," which necessitates an expansion of the subject matter of representation to include a range of social environments, the inequalities between which are then made more obvious. This, of course, accounts for the employment of realism by, among others, socially-conscious and politically active writers, who used it to criticize reality by showing its more uncomfortable aspects; the Chicago stockyards, Victorian workhouses, strikes, and so forth.[2]

In this study, however, we are working with a different sense of critical realism, one which concerns not simply the content of a representation, or the social attitudes which might be adduced, but rather goes to the very possibility of realism in the first place. In *War and Peace* the realism of the novel depends on, among other things, the establishment of society and history as cornerstones of the reality towards which the text is intended. The realism of the novel depends upon the recognition that the regulating effects of society pervade and inform what the characters understand as reality. The emergence of this idea of reality and the ways in which it is represented are illustrations of the problems which ideas such as society, and history involve. History and society are given determinate form in the representational structure, but at the same time they are made available for critical analysis; we are able to understand history not as a simple series of objective facts, but as a complicated negotiation between different ways of understanding and characterizing human experience.

This idea of critical realism, then, countenances a kind of ambivalence in the idea of realism. Indeed, this ambivalence is at the very heart of its

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[1]Becker, *Documents of Modern Literary Realism*, p.22.
[2]Becker, *Documents of Modern Literary Realism*, p.25.

critical qualities. Within this idea of realism there are two contrapuntal interpretive possibilities. On the one hand, realism necessarily creates and sets out to communicate a determinate image of social and historical reality, suggesting that reality can be understood, can be known. On the other, however, this knowledge is inextricably tied to the questioning of its own possibility. As the determinate reality emerges, so too do the structures and processes which render it determinate, suggesting that reality can only ever be a provisional idea. To recall one of the critical concepts discussed above, reality is a kind of "shifter"; it is always at once determinate and indeterminate, concrete and abstract.

This chapter concludes the theoretical discussion of this study. In what follows I shall recapitulate the various stages of my argument in order to reaffirm the idea of realism I have tried to develop, and the implications for critical theory of such an idea. I shall show how the surveys and analyses of various movements and developments in critical theory which comprise the first two parts of this study establish the propositions advanced in the introduction to this study. These, to recall, are the continued usefulness of the idea of realism in literary studies, and the benefits to literary theory *qua* theory which are made possible by the productive use of the concept of realism.

(a) Anti-realism: the problem of theory in practice

"Critical," as we have seen, means a relentless suspicion towards seemingly determinate ideas, events, or situations. To be critical means never to be satisfied with "the way it is." Critical theories, then, or, more specifically, critical literary theories seek to infuse literary criticism with this kind of suspicion, to take it (and perhaps literature) away from any structures of meaning which show traces of, variously, positivism, idealism, empiricism, humanism, or anything else which seems to countenance an essential standard according to which literature, the reading of literature, and the criticism of literature can be determined.

But alongside critical theory, we have the concept of the realistic novel, which involves the representation of a determinate, concrete, and transpersonal reality; the realistic novel is a detailed account of "the way it is." As we have seen, critical theories of various orientations have

observed just this sort of connection, or, rather, break, between efforts to be critical and the realistic novel (or at least its realistic efficacy). Realism depends upon determinations of reality, conceptual and practical. The conceptual determination involves relying upon certain discourses as realistic - the historical, and geographical - and the necessary circumscription and selection of reality in a novel acts as a kind of practical determination. But determinations of all kinds - such as the determinism of "human nature," or the overdeterminations of ideological structures, - are the very target of these critical theories.

This antithesis between critical theory and realism, and between theories and practices which abjure realism and those which do not, is, I suggest, misconceived. As I have tried to show, critical theories which, either explicitly or implicitly, attack realism exhibit several important shortcomings. At times critical theory seems little more than aestheticism or avant-gardism, a stance which can, with some justice, itself be theoretically criticized as solipsistic or simply objected to as elitist. Adorno, for example, conflates the ideological (which serves as a target for political and philosophical critique) with philistinism (which implies a kind of lack of cultivation). The distrust of, or even contempt for, "public opinion" or "common sense" exhibited variously by Genette, Todorov, and Belsey are further examples of how the claims of literary theorists to be critical often run the risk of sliding into simple boasts to know better than everybody else. At other times, the failings of various critical theories are more complicated. Althusser and Derrida, for example, must confront the problem that their critical perspective cannot take account of that which it seeks to criticize without being tainted by the necessary proximity.

These problems of theory *qua* theory are compounded by the frequent misrepresentation of realism when it is used as a conceptual target at which critical points are aimed. The range of theories which were discussed in Part I is not, by any means, homogenous. Shklovsky and Tomashevsky, for example, redefine art to *exclude* the realistic, and Adorno and Benjamin, similarly exclude the realistic from the artistic, denying it the philosophical (and supposedly political) emancipatory capacity they ascribe to art. This exclusion of realism on the basis of its supposed linguistic or philosophical positivism (for want of a better term)

is motivated by a new regime of absolutism, a privileging of the critic on the basis of her or his greater acuity.

Realism, however, is not always excluded. Barthes, for example, makes very important use of realism, and his analyses, which are perhaps slightly tongue-in-cheek, of Flaubert and of Balzac are designed to reveal that realistic novels are not *only* realistic, and that the persistent privileging of the realistic over the semiotic needs to be redressed. While his rejection of realism is not so strident[3] as Shklovsky's or Adorno's, Barthes is still implicating realism as one of a number of disingenuous and/or hubristic artistic practices, which claims its representational achievements with little anxiety about its procedures or effects. Similarly, Macherey didn't so much reject the forms commonly associated with realism as propose a new way of understanding them which focused not upon their realism but the extent to which they parodied ideological production.[4]

But the critical theories discussed in Part I have got it wrong, at least with regard to realism. It is not, I suggest, necessary for critical theory either to propose a different aesthetic model or to "deconstruct" realism in order for it to achieve or maintain its philosophical inquisitiveness and rigour. Indeed, the anti-realistic tendency of much twentieth-century critical theory has been one idea which reveals the shortcomings of these theories. Where a particularly reductive account of realism is used as a critical target, critical theory is necessarily similarly reductive, and what should be a dialogue becomes a simple binary opposition between, say, James Joyce and George Eliot. Another major shortcoming is the privileging of the critic, a claim somehow to have got outside the congeries of competing truth-claims, and found an authoritative vantage point. As we have seen, such manoeuvres, Althusser's anti-experiential anti-humanism, for example, rarely weather close scrutiny.[5] It is this kind of critical orthodoxy which occasioned Raymond Williams' critique of

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[3]This is not to say that structuralism didn't have its own avant-gardism which did, Young Turk style, seek not merely to re-read the old guard, but to forge a new era in aesthetics.

[4]At the risk of seeming to hedge my bets, I should reiterate that Macherey's theory of the implicit duality of all texts has been highly instructive, and I would not want my critique of his work to be read as an outright rejection or condemnation.

[5]E.P. Thompson's long essay "The Poverty of Theory" is a particularly good illustration of this. At the beginning of the essay he establishes the key points of his thesis, among which is the charge that Althusser "has no category (or way of handling) 'experience'"; see E.P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory & Other Essays* (London: Merlin Press, 1978), p.4.

critical theory, an account of which is given by Andrew Milner. According to Milner, Williams detects a "formalist dogmatism at work in the newly-emerging anti-realist orthodoxies" which encourages a kind of second-order cultural criticism at the expense of cultural production (in this case realistic films) itself.[6] Milner goes on to suggest that Williams' critique is "very close to what should have been the last word on post-structuralist anti-realism."[7]

Critical theory, then, cannot profit, or even sustain itself, by relying upon reductive accounts of its supposed opposites, nor by failing to turn its own critical eye upon itself. Fredric Jameson, as we have seen, traces a continuity between the anti-realism of the Frankfurt School and that of post-structuralism and then suggests that the Realism/Modernism debate of the 1930s has been reformulated in terms of a Platonic attack on representation. The invocation of Plato is particularly telling. Plato's suspicion of *mimesis*, of course, derived from his conviction that it was essentially *false*, a position which presupposed that he knew what was *true*. In a sense, the capacity of contemporary critics similarly to reject realism depends upon their faith in their own access to something like the truth. Critical theory, I suggest, needs a different approach, of which the position of the concept of realism can serve as an index. A rethinking of realism, then, is interdependent upon a kind of revision of critical theory itself.

Of course, a re-evaluation of realism doesn't necessarily require any attention to theory at all, it may simply reject or deny the suspicious tendency of literary theory, and hold to a seemingly very simple faith in the representational capacity of literature. But the most productive accounts of realism, such as that of Auerbach, do not depend upon such faith. Indeed, as I shall try to show, an approach is possible which values realism precisely because of the extent to which it depends upon philosophical and literary theories which are truly critical.

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[6]Milner, *Cultural Materialism*, p.98.
[7]Milner, *Cultural Materialism*, p.98.

(b) Realism as theory: reality and the"way it is"

As I tried to show at the beginning of this chapter, the hermeneutic situation precipitated by literary realism is particularly complicated. The simple situation with which *War and Peace* opens is, in Auerbach's great phrase, fraught with background, and the vagaries, problems and conflicts which underpin the scene constitute a vast indeterminate structure upon which the fragile reality of the text is based. The knowledge of reality which readers achieve is not, then, the kind of authoritative and (supposedly) objective overview presupposed by anti-realism. Rather than the cognitive mastery which critical theory is intended to discourage, realism provides an interpretive engagement with a particular idea or model of reality, of which readers achieve only a partial, surrogate kind of knowledge, limited and incomplete.

There is more to this situation. Rather than characterizing the knowledge countenanced by realism as limited or partial, it might be better to speak of it as fictional. Rather than an experience which is authentic or truthful, readers achieve a kind of synthetic knowledge of reality, and the vehicle of that synthesis, of course, is fiction. Historical social environments, strata of reality, paradoxically come to the reader through the sheer artifice of fiction, a point which warrants careful consideration.

In a series of relatively recent works, the three volumes of *Time and Narrative,* Paul Ricœur has investigated some of the complexities of representation, particularly insofar as narratives - historical and fictional - act as a figure of temporal experience. He suggests that the experience of time is the organization of time into a narrative, which makes it accessible to human consciousness. In the course of his study, Ricœur describes what he calls the hermeneutic arc, which encompasses the different dimensions in which human action is figured: it is prefigured, understood in the first place; configured, rendered into tangible narrative form; and refigured, the configured human action being then reinterpreted specifically *as* human action.

While Ricœur's study, as I have already mentioned, has much in common with my own, it is not my intention here to consider the reinterpretation of Augustine and Aristotle upon which he bases his

analysis of the "truth-claims" of fictional and historical narratives. Nonetheless, a brief glance at a few of his points is instructive, as it serves to illustrate the kind of phenomenon with which we are dealing when we speak of literary realism. Ricœur identifies what he calls a "triple *mimèsis*"[8], three narrative moments which correspond to the three stages of the hermeneutic process. Of these, the second, *mimèsis* II, is particularly important.

Ricœur uses *mimèsis* II to refer to the text itself; while all experience is narrative, this is the *actual* narrative, the story set out in textual form. But the human experience reflected in the text is a special kind of experience:

> With *mimèsis* II the realm of the *as if* opens up. One could say, in accord with current usage in literary criticism, the realm of *fiction*.[9]

In the second volume of the series, Ricœur amplifies his analysis of *mimèsis* II, specifically with regard to fictional narratives, and begins also to consider the question of realism, as distinct from the concept of *mimèsis* which encompasses a different range of considerations. Throughout, Ricœur is concerned to explore the figurative resources of all representational narratives insisting that these, and not some immutable origin, constitute the referential capacity of language.[10]

Without recapitulating Ricœur's argument at any length, I want to stress that his theory of narrative countenances a particularly tensile relationship between the need for and unavoidability of interpretation and the concession that interpretive structures cannot claim any kind of universality or originary basis. Mario J. Valdés, in his introduction to an edited collection of Ricœur's essays suggests that Ricœur represents a kind of post-structuralist alternative to deconstruction. Derrida and Ricœur agree, he says, that meaning is not found but made in patterns of reiteration and that language is ineluctably polysemic, but they disagree on the extent of the resulting absence of semantic order. Deconstruction sets

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[8]See Paul Ricœur, *Temps et récit, Tome I*, Paris: Seuil, 1983, p.85.
[9]Ricœur, *Temps et récit, I*, p.101, trans. mine.
[10]See Ricœur, *Temps et récit, Tome II*, Paris: Seuil, 1984, pp.23ff.

itself against order of all kinds, but Ricœur countenances a kind of creative or tensional order,[11] of which the *as if* is a particularly good example.

The knowledge and experience of reality, the "truth" implied by the idea of the true-to-life, even the reality itself, which are implicit in the concept of the realistic novel, belong, I suggest, to this realm of the *as if*. Rather than claiming something like truth, which, if it means anything at all, means something which is eternal and universal, realism then claims only to synthesize something like a particular fictional knowledge of reality. In the realm of the fictional, claims are necessarily cautious; or, rather, they are claims of a different kind to the philosophical and political absolutes attributed to realism by the critical theories represented in the first part of this study.

This synthetic realm of the *as if*, or the fictional, I suggest, is a good illustration of the fundamental limits to the claims to truth and knowledge upon which reaism depends. By working within these limits, realism not only qualifies its own claims, but also highlights the very problems of truth and knowledge which are the predominant concerns of critical theories of all kinds. By producing a kind of fictional knowledge and experience, realism, I suggest, demonstrates perhaps not the fictionality of all knowledge and experience, but at least their synthetic qualities. By synthetic I do not mean (only) fictional. The idea of synthesis suggests that knowledge and experience are the results of the blending and melding of different ideas, rather than processes or products of simple discovery. In a dialectical sense, of course, synthesis is the final step in an on-going process of development. But the simple binary of the dialectic does not exhaust the idea of synthesis, which can here be understood as the concentration and transformation of many and different theses.

In the case of realism, some of these theses are the very problematic ideas with which literary theory has grappled. A model or concept of the real world, language and textuality, representation and literary form; the achievement of the realistic novel is to synthesize these so as to produce knowledge of a particular social and historical reality. Readers, who necessarily have their own real world, must be familiarized with a

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[11]See Mario J. Valdés, "Paul Ricœur's Post-Structuralist Hermeneutics", in Mario J. Valdés, ed., *A Ricœur Reader: Reflection and Imagination*, pp.21-25.

particular model of the real world synthesized in a given work of realism, with its fundamental structures and organizing principles. Reading the text, then, is a kind of temporary relocation of oneself, a relocation made possible by the fictional status of the text, in order to achieve both a simulacrum of experience of the fictional location, and a kind of distant overview of it.

These are, admittedly, highly abstract suggestions, and, in the following section I hope to make them more concrete through the analysis of two substantial novels specifically in terms of their realism. At this stage, however, even these abstractions are enough to illustrate the extraordinary complexity of literary realism, a complexity which belies the reductuve and regressive concept of realism against which many critical theories have been directed. Rather than a simple faith in the "way it is", realism can be understood as a kind of essay on the "way it is." By achieving a determinate representation of a specific stratum of social and historical reality, realism relies upon and highlights some of the more perplexing properties of the ideas around which the real is built. History, politics, geography, and society; these and other ideas associated with the real world are, in the realm of the *as if*, brought into high relief by realism.

(c) Realism and theory: towards a synthesis

The fraught situation of the *as if*, the idea of reading texts *as if* they represented the real in some absolute sense, aware, however, that they do not, returns us to the idea of the theory of realism. I have argued that the structures of the critical methods discussed in Part I do not provide a satisfactory conceptual framework within which the complexities of this situation can properly be explored. In different ways, these critical methods posit an idea of realism which presupposes some very simple conceptual procedures, based fundamentally upon a very uncomplicated philosophical apprehension of the ideas of reality and of literature. This crude cognitive simplicity then provides a ready target for critical theory, which sets about claiming greater philosophical acuity according to the extent to which it is able to distance itself from the crushing objectifying and reifying procedures of realism.

In Part II, however, I turned to a different group of critical theorists, each of whom offers a body of critical work which constitutes an important challenge to this kind of critical logic. The possibility of exploring and amplifying these challenges, moreover, is not always realized. This is due sometimes simply to oversight, or sometimes to the different ways in which the work of these critical theorists, particularly that of Bakhtin, is itself interpreted. In any case, Part II was designed to illustrate how the very complicated philosophical procedures of these critical authors are susceptible to incorporation into a different idea of realism.

My discussions of Lukács, Auerbach and Bakhtin were intended to restore some of the complexity of the idea of realism by placing it against the background of the critical premises of each of these theorists. In the case of Lukács, such an approach is not entirely successful, but it does nonetheless show how realism is not necessarily dependent upon a simple cognitive empiricism. Indeed, as we have seen, Lukács' earliest work is motivated by an extreme anxiety about the coherence of the social and historical world, the very opposite of the bourgeois self-satisfaction from which realism is sometimes said to have emerged.[12] This cognitive anxiety is the motivation for Lukács' turn to aesthetics, although at the time of *Soul and Form* his aesthetic preferences were, loosely, Romantic rather than realistic.

Lukács' dialectical turn, or rather turns (to Hegel and then to Marx), occasioned a revision of his aesthetic preferences. His faith in dialectical thinking changed the position of literature with regard to his philosophical concerns: whereas *Soul and Form* suggested that art was a kind of escape, Lukács' later work used art as an emblem of the philosophical approaches which he saw as making possible a coherent apprehension of the social world. History and society, according to dialectical thinking, were necessarily in motion and Lukács argued that realism depended upon, and so represented, this kind of understanding.

But Lukács' preference for realism, as we have seen, is problematic. In the first place, it is prescriptive, conflating literature with realism as dogmatically as his Frankfurt School opponents had excluded the realistic

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[12]One must, of course, concede that there is a general historical contemporaneity, but the characterization of realism as a bourgeois form usually implies a more fundamental identity between the two.

from the realm of the artistic. More importantly, his theory of realism, while it did not rest upon an unproblematic apprehension of reality, did seem to involve a fairly unproblematic notion of the interpretation of literature. He seems to suggest that the dialectical materialism of realism would simply be there for all to see, the emergence of the hero from a historical totality perfectly obvious as just that.

To make use of Lukács, then, requires a certain degree of manipulation, a selection of some of his productive insights and an abandonment of some of his failings. In *The Theory of the Novel*, for example, we have, perhaps, Lukács' most interesting suggestion: the ineluctable irony of the novel. The novel, Lukács argues, represents what might be called ironic unities. Dealing with concrete and determinate representations, such as, for example, social and historical reality, the novel necessarily undermines its own representations through its irony. It is not merely that the concrete representations of the novel can be negated by a critical perspective, but rather that they are essentially self-negating, they represent their own dissolution. But the implications for the interpretation of literature in general of such an insight are vitiated by Lukács' need to place it into a dialectical progression. The irony of the novel, then, is useful only insofar as it represents a transitionary stage between the (misconceived) unity of the epic which has passed, and the (idealistic) unity which is to come. Lukács, in a sense, cannot settle for irony.

The irony of the novel, as I have said, was perhaps Lukács' most suggestive idea. It might have given rise to a theory of interpretation which demands determination - the interpretation must arrive at some sort of concrete representation - but never overestimates its authority. As we have seen, however, when Lukács turns to realism, it is as the literary adjunct of his dialectical "solution" to the problems of history and society, rather than as a representation of the problems themselves. If we were to cobble together, anachronistically, some of Lukács' ideas, a more searching theory of realism might be inferred. His sense of the problematic social world, the irony of the novel, and a preference for realism might be combined to articulate a theory of realism which, as well as jettisoning Lukács' tendency to parody other literary forms, such as the epic or modernism, might have served the needs of this study very appropriately. To do so, however, important aspects of Lukács' theory would have to be

overlooked. The contribution to this thesis of his work, then, is necessarily limited and qualified.

Lukács' work shows how realism can be conceived of as emerging from a problematic apprehension of the social world. If the background to Lukács' preference for realism is considered, and the consistencies in his thought traced, we can see that Lukács, until, perhaps, the politically fraught essays of the 1930s and 1940s, considers reality, or "the way it is," an extremely complicated problem, a problem which is not entirely solved by the relatively unproblematic notion of realism at which he arrives. Nonetheless, the supposed essentialism of realism, the rejection of, or at least the failure to appreciate, the idea of reality as a problem, is not something which can be traced in Lukács' thought. His most interesting contribution to a theory of interpretation, the irony of the novel, is eventually lost, and was originally flawed by its dialectical framework. But Lukács, as perhaps the most ardent theorist of realism in the twentieth-century, shows, at least in part, how attacks on realism have often been misconceived.

With Auerbach and Bakhtin, on the other hand, the relationship between literature and reality, and the problems of interpretation, are more sensitively appreciated. For Auerbach, the necessity of interpretation in the comprehension of reality cannot be satisfied by recourse to a kind of underlying structure of social and historical reality. Neither the dialectical approach preferred by Marxists nor even the cyclical approach outlined by Vico is sufficient to explain the constructed, interpreted quality of reality. Yet if reality is no more than a barrage of existential phenomena, not guided by an essential movement of history, the necessary limits of human cognition give rise to a need for interpretation. In his discussion of Montaigne, for example, and the idea of autobiography, Auerbach suggests that the randomness of the experienced world and the impulse to orient oneself within experience and so order and determine the flow of experience, are mutually indicative. Each is evidence of the other.

For Auerbach, the relationship between realism and reality is that realism is similarly in need of interpretation. Interpreting a text *as* realistic becomes a way of illustrating the complexities of an idea of interpretation which is not a search for the single underlying meaning of a text, but the

process of making meaning where there is none. Realism, or more properly mimesis, takes its place alongside Auerbach's other interpretive strategies, such as historicism and figural interpretation. This not only suggests that realism cannot be conflated with simple self-evident positivism, but also that the very interpretation of texts must be understood as a process of determination, rather than discovery. The social embeddedness, the attention to background which is characteristic of the realistic novel, Auerbach suggests, is not a positivistic impulse, but an illustration of how reality is interpreted in the first place, how conceptual figures such as history serve to interpret the world, to make reality concrete.

Auerbach, then, problematizes reality, realism, and the interpretation of literature. All of these, he suggests, need to be determined, but all of these determinations derive from an apprehension of indeterminacy. While they proceed, in a sense, from propositions about the "way it is" - concrete historical environments, the background to a particular story - his approach is truly critical because all of these concrete ideas, including the capacity of the critic to arrive at a final determination of a text, are under a question mark. For Auerbach, the interpretation of literature is an activity which is necessarily meaningful, but not authoritatively so, an activity which parallels the apprehension of reality itself. Realism takes its place in such a scheme as a particularly pointed example of the problem of interpretation.

For Bakhtin, indeterminacy looms even larger. Much of his critical theory is devoted to revealing the shortcomings of authoritative theories which seek definitively to define human activities. Ethics, epistemology, language and literary theory are all redefined by Bakhtin as activities which cannot be guided by *a priori* principles. On the other hand, even if there can be no definitive determination, as I have tried to show, Bakhtin is still very concerned with determinate concepts, including literary representation. Interpretive figures, such as the chronotope or heteroglossia, incorporate both dimensions of Bakhtin's critical theory, his concern with the interpretation of literature and his "sideways glance" which always relativizes interpretive statements by acknowledging their dialogic status.

The three critical authors discussed in Part II, then, provide material for the basis of an idea of critical realism. As I have tried to show, the philosophical and literary concerns of each are entirely consistent with the problematic, suspicious, interrogative demands of critical theory. For each, the "way it is" is a problem; a question rather than an answer. Alongside these critical concerns, however, each entertains the idea of realism as a creative adjunct to this problem.

The progression from Lukács through Auerbach to Bakhtin, furthermore, charts the increased degree to which each might be said to have realized a comprehensively critical theory. Lukács, for example, cannot be said to have considered realism an aesthetic problem or question. Indeed, throughout his career he persistently turned to art as an *answer*, and, more particularly, as a final answer to the philosophical problems which troubled him. Nonetheless, the analysis of Lukács' work which I have tried to set out in Chapter Four shows how Lukács' own thought undermines the philosophical claims he makes for art in general, and for realism in particular. Lukács' tendency to cry "Eureka," as it were, is belied by the fact that his questions are so much more thoughtfully expressed than his answers. In the case of realism, his simple correspondence theory is undermined by the extent to which he conceives of society and history, which are the representational lynchpins of realism, as fundamentally unfinalizable. The totality of which he speaks, and which holds, he suggests, the key to cognitive certainty, is an abstract ideal, the achievement of which is not seriously complicated. Not only is Lukács' claim for realism relativized by being placed against the complex background of his theories of irony and of the dialectic, but his dogmatic prescriptions and proscriptions, largely responsible for the critical disrepute into which he has often fallen, must also be placed against the fraught background of his own political biography.

Auerbach, on the other hand, doesn't make such extravagant claims for realism. Rather, his fundamentally historicist approach negotiates between what he sees as a human necessity to make sense, to make meaning, and his conviction that any structures founded upon these human certainties are only fragile edifices within the world of nations. For Auerbach history requires such structures, as do personal histories, according to what Holquist calls the biographical principle. But history and

biography also undermine and eventually deconstruct these human ideas, and it is this fundamental ambivalence which Auerbach traces in literary history and places at the heart of the idea of realism he holds.

Bakhtin, perhaps more comprehensively than Lukács or Auerbach, develops a critical theory which is fundamentally preoccupied with ambivalence and tension. The idea of the dialogic, and all the associated theoretical figures of which Bakhtin speaks, are, as I have tried to show, different ways of entertaining and understanding seemingly contradictory possibilities. Realism, as we have seen, arises as one of Bakhtin's concerns, but it is also possible to develop the theory of the dialogic to include an idea of realism which mediates between the determinate claims of representation and the relativizing tendencies of dialogic critique. In Chapter Six, I have tried to detail such a development through an analysis of much of Bakhtin's work in which the tension and critical inquisitiveness of dialogic thought were extended to the idea of literary realism.

The theoretical idea of realism which I have tried to develop in this study draws upon all of these critical foundations. Realism, I suggest, requires that a particular model or idea of reality is posited specifically as the real. It becomes, in a sense, a working model. This reality is built around and upon certain concepts, certain points of reference. These include ideas of history and of geography, of society and of politics. These organizing principles form general concepts and the particular model or idea of reality presupposed by a realistic novel will give these general concepts concrete form, setting its fictional action in a particular social and historical situation, a determinate time and space.

But this determinate structure, this reality, of which the reader achieves a certain degree of synthetic knowledge, is then set against the different relativizing strategies suggested by the kinds of critical theories discussed in Part II. Locations, such as Anna Pávlovna's drawing room, are not only realistic, they are also examples of what Bakhtin calls chronotopes, dialogic structures which provisionally but effectively make narrative concrete. The idea of reality which makes literary realism possible, then, allows the very idea of reality itself critically to be explored, to be, using the terms of the critical theories discussed, historicized, ironized, dialogized.

Such a theoretical approach and reading strategy suggests that the determination and representation of social and historical reality, rather than being a point of closure, provides an ingress for the critical exploration of that environment, and of the idea of reality of which it is an example. Realism, from such a point of view, is critical not (only) because it provides troubling representations of Victorian workhouses, or of the plight of the urban poor, but because it brings the very idea of reality into critical relief. By achieving what really could be called the impossible, communicating knowledge of reality across time and space, realism involves and explores the ineluctable ambivalence of such seemingly determinate ideas as history, society, knowledge, and, ultimately, reality.

(d) Realism and reality - a critical relationship.

In my discussion of Adorno in the first part of this study, I quoted his remark that proponents of realism are

> guilty of a lie: the lie of delivering ... (themselves) over to the world with a love that presupposes that the world is meaningful ...[13]

Adorno's remark is puzzling, and can perhaps be explained through a correlation of his theoretical positions with his precarious historical situation. Such a possibility notwithstanding, in this study I have tried to show that realism is not guilty of such a "lie." By "the world is meaningful" Adorno, I suppose, means something like inherently meaningful, divinely ordered, objectively knowable. Realism "loves" the world, he suggests, which suggestion we might amplify by proposing that realism believes in the world, or has faith in the world.

But while Adorno is correct to question such attitudes, I have tried to show that realism certainly doesn't rely upon them. It is not, I suggest, that the world is inherently "meaningful," but rather that it is inevitably full of meanings, full of ideas, and among these the idea of reality is one of the most important and most complicated. Realism and critics who would continue to speak of it do not "love" the world in the unreflective fashion described by Adorno. Rather, they deliver themselves over to the world

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[13]See pp.48-49 above.

with curiosity, inquisitiveness. The world, or more particularly, reality, is not an objective entity in which we are to believe, but it is the environment in which human activity, which we cannot avoid, takes place and takes shape. The complicated interpretive transmigration upon which realism relies, then, is not necessarily the theoretical equivalent of blind faith. By seeking to correlate the enormously complicated ideas of literature and reality, realism, I suggest, can be one way in which the possibilities and problems associated with the ideas of literature and reality, and the relationship between them, can be explored.

In the following part of this study I shall try to supplement the theoretical argument advanced in this chapter with two essays in literary criticism. In each case, the idea of realism and the realistic achievements of the novel will serve as the focus of my inquiry. The procedures and structures of the two novels are markedly different and I hope to exploit these differences in testing my theoretical contentions against what is, after all, the very substance of literary studies, the reading of texts. These essays serve more adequately to conclude this study. While I have been engaged in a study in literary theory, it is always necessary for literary theory actually to contribute to the reading of literary texts. By focusing upon realism I shall try, then, to marry the theoretical suggestions raised in my discussion to critical practice.

III

Reading Realism: Theory and Practice

In previous chapters, and particularly the last, I have been advancing the theoretical claims of this thesis. Critique of various directions in literary theory, claims about the position of the concept of realism in literary theory, and further claims for and about literary theory in general have been set out in order to establish two related propositions: a theory of realism; and a theory, as it were, of literary theory. So far, however, these theoretical claims have been just that - theoretical - by which I mean both that I have made these claims within the generic discipline of literary theory, and that they are, as yet, disembodied, not related to the practices of realism, to novels. A glance at Bakhtin's mistrust of what he called "theoreticism" should be enough to remind us, then, that the validity and usefulness of these claims is as yet unproven: a critical theory of literature is not only critical insofar as its intellectual rigour is concerned, but it is also, properly speaking, a theory of literary criticism, of the reading and interpretation of texts which then is articulated as criticism.

This part will redress this "theoreticism." As we have been concerned with literary theory, it has been necessary to concentrate largely upon theoretical material. But my discussion of literary theory has culminated in claims about realism and about literary criticism which can only properly be supported, and tested, by what might be called practical criticism.

The two chapters in this final part concern literary texts from different cultures and eras, and by authors of different genders. This is not to say, however, that the claims which I have made are universal; theoretical questions about gender, about race, about nationality, have not properly been considered in this thesis, and would sustain separate studies in themselves. Rather, my theoretical claims concern the questions raised within the theoretical material addressed in this thesis; questions about the apprehension of the social world (in general, rather than this or that particular world), the interpretation of history, the uses and possibilities of

language. The theoretical terrain is general and formal, and the two texts chosen for explication provide general and formal contrasts as well as important specific cultural contrasts, and it is the former with which we are here concerned.

The first novel discussed is George Eliot's *Middlemarch*. The rationale for the inclusion of this text is fairly simple; it has figured significantly in discussions of literary realism virtually since its first appearance. Insofar as the period concept of realism is concerned, *Middlemarch* is often evoked as the English model, and, for very similar reasons, it has the distinction of having been a central text over which the realism debate, such as it is, has been conducted, at least in English language criticism. Its usefulness for the present study, then, is fairly clear, it is the kind of text which initiated the controversy which forms the background of this study. Coupled with Eliot's and Lewes' critical preference for realism, these reasons make *Middlemarch* an ideal test case.

My reasons for including John Dos Passos' *USA* are less self-evident. There are, perhaps, more appropriate examples of realism in twentieth-century American literature; Theodore Dreiser, Sinclair Lewis, or Edith Wharton, might have offered novels which are closer to standard ideas of realism. Dos Passos is more often considered in terms of his formal experimentation or his political biography than of his formal realism, classed variously among the American modernists or the proletarian writers. Certainly his experiments in cross-generic representation - the impact of journalism and of film upon *U.S.A.* are examples of this - or his common ground with poets such as e.e. cummings, his Harvard colleague, or his significance in the history of the American Left, may make my choice to concentrate on his realism seem curious.

However, while it may be curious, it is not, I suggest, outlandish. In *U.S.A.* we see not only formal experimentation but also a project to try realistically to represent the lives of individuals within a concrete historical environment. Sections of *U.S.A.* for example, taken in isolation, are similar in method to the work of naturalistic contemporaries of Dos Passos such as James T. Farrell. In *U.S.A.*, there is the same attention to social detail and to the assimilation of historical events as in, say, *War and Peace*, where the historical background of Napoleon's invasion of Russia

influences each narrative scene just as J. Ward Moorehouse, Dick Savage, and Joe Williams, for example, live out their stories against the Great War. *U.S.A.* is not *only* realistic, but among other things, it does evince a realistic dimension.

The less realistic, or experimental, properties of the novel do not, I suggest, negate the realism of the novel. The different narrative levels are an implicit acknowledgement that the apprehension and representation of reality is a complex matter, and the questions of genre which might be raised with regard to *U.S.A.* certainly can influence the representational effect of a text. However, while these matters are more immediately evident in *U.S.A.*, similar ideas can be traced in more conventionally realistic narratives. Technical questions such as the assimilation of speech into the realistic novel, or, more pointedly, of the importance of the epistle in the development of the realistic novel in England, are not entirely dissimilar issues to those regarding narrative structure in *U.S.A.* As I shall try to show, the experimental qualities of *U.S.A.* complicate, but do not overshadow, the broad realistic panorama of the historical world which it presents. The different narrative levels, are reliefs of the overall picture which the novel presents. Rather than an antithesis between, to put it crudely, its form and its content, there is an important interrelation between the two. The ordinary lives are set off by the fragmented and highlighted representations of different perspectives, or of highlighted elements of ordinary life, but the overall realism of the novel contextualizes, and so assimilates, the narrative intrusions. The multiple characters and multiple plots, furthermore, are not without precedent in more conventional narratives. Similar tendencies are evident in Dickens' novels, or in Jane Austen's, although in *U.S.A.* they are more clearly signalled by their sub-headings.

While Chapter 9 is certainly not an exercise in specialist Dos Passos criticism, my inclusion of *U.S.A.* gestures against critical tendencies to overstate the experimental in the novel at the expense of the realistic. This shall be taken up in due course. At this stage, it is necessary only to set out some of the reasons for my inclusion of these two particular texts. While the texts which might have been included in this part are innumerable, *Middlemarch* and *U.S.A.* have been chosen for their similarities and for their differences. They are similar insofar as each is intended towards the

representation of the social and historical world. We might say that *Middlemarch* tends more towards the social and *U.S.A.* towards the historical, but each has, in a sense, a theory of the apprehension of the world. But their narrative approaches are, of course, markedly different. For Eliot, the social becomes both a representational horizon and, as we shall see, a feature of the narrative method. Dos Passos' world is historical and political, and his narrative techniques, including his experimentation, assimilate and represent this historical world.

Despite their differences, then, these two novels are encompassed by the idea of realism which I have developed. They certainly differ from other kinds of novels which might not be regarded as realistic. In *Ulysses*, for example, while some parts of the text *are* fairly conventional narrative realism, formal experimentation sets an imaginative/symbolic structure over and against the representation of the social world. By contrast, in *Gulliver's Travels* formal conventionality collides with a fantastic content, which generates a different kind of representational relationship with the social world.

The differences between the two texts not only challenge the theoretical claims of this thesis to accommodate such divergent texts but also illustrate the range of literary texts which can still be considered in terms of realism. The representation of the "real world," a world which is both individually and collectively available, a social and historical reality, is still among the literary concepts of which literary criticism and theory can make productive use. The following chapters are exercises in this kind of criticism. I am not suggesting that realism is necessarily preferable to, say, the Gothic, or to postmodernism; narrative to lyric; the novel to the *nouveau roman*. Rather, as I have tried to show, these essays will try to establish my contentions that the critical antagonism to realism is misplaced, and that literary theory and criticism can profit from the realization that the "end" of realism as a critical concept has been premature.

- 8 -

'At the Green Dragon': realism and the social in Middlemarch

> This is, and is not, Cressid.
> Within my soul there doth conduce a fight
> Of this strange nature that a thing inseparate
> Divides more wider than the sky and earth;
> And yet the spacious breadth of this division
> Admits no orifex for a point as subtle
> As Ariachne's broken woof to enter.
> - Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*.

George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871-72) "is, and is not," a lot of things. The complexity of the novel has generated a long history of vastly divergent critical responses. Henry James, in his well-known review, seemed not quite sure what to make of the novel. Like Troilus contemplating Cressida and Diomedes, James is caught between conflicting sentiments, his response is deeply ambivalent: "*Middlemarch* is at once one of the strongest and one of the weakest of English novels."[1]

James' ambivalence is particularly pregnant. His mixed response prefigures the history of *Middlemarch* criticism, which has been marked by divergent and contradictory appraisals.[2] But, more importantly, the novel itself validates this kind of ambivalence. Not, I suggest, because it is at once weak and strong, but because, in many ways, it embodies the same kind of seeming oxymoron. Many elements of the novel can be pursued to different interpretive ends just as they could, if such were the critical purpose at hand, be characterized either as strengths or weaknesses.

The matter here, of course, is the question of realism in the novel, the manner in which it represents the social and historical reality of provincial life during the brief period just before the first Reform Bill in which it is set. A cursory glance at critical treatment of this question

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[1]Henry James, unsigned review, in David Carroll ed., *George Eliot: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), p.353.

[2]Dorothea Barrett, writing about Eliot criticism in general, comments upon this, arguing that, until recently, the predominant critical view of Eliot led to critics either embracing or disparaging her and her work; see Dorothea Barrett, *Vocation and Desire: George Eliot's Heroines* (London: Routledge, 1991), p.1.

reveals that it, too, has its share of controversy and ambivalence. J. Hillis Miller, for example, in two important essays on *Middlemarch*, sets claims about the novel as "perhaps the masterwork of Victorian realism" against searching deconstructionist analysis which undermines that very claim.[3]

But it is not just a matter of conflicting critical evaluations of the realism of the novel. In the following analysis I shall try to show how ambivalence is a critical feature of the realism of the novel, and that realism in *Middlemarch* is an important ingress into the complexities of the novel. To try to determine whether the novel is or is not realistic, or that, if so, its realism is or is not a productive element of the text, is, I shall try to show, to overlook the critical possibilitites of *Middlemarch* and of realism in general. In order to do so, it is necessary to look closely at the text to establish what kind of realism is at work in *Middlemarch*.

(a) Public Rooms: the primacy of the social

The reality towards which the narrative of *Middlemarch* is intended might be called a reality of the social. Middlemarch and its environs are represented in concrete detail and the narrative aims to capture a sense of what the narrator calls the "subtle movement" of provincial life. At the beginning of Chapter 71 (1871-72), a fairly typical example of life in the town is introduced:

> Five days after the death of Raffles, Mr Bambridge was standing at his leisure under the large archway leading into the yard of the Green Dragon. He was not fond of solitary contemplation, but he had only just come out of the house, and any human figure standing at ease under the archway in the early afternoon was as certain to attract companionship as a pigeon which has found something worth pecking at. In this case there was no material object to feed upon, but the eye of reason saw a probability of mental sustenance in the shape of gossip.[4]

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[3]J. Hillis Miller, "Optic and Semiotic in *Middlemarch*" in Jerome Buckley ed., *The Worlds of Victorian Fiction* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975), p.127; see also Miller, "Narrative and History", *ELH* 41 (Fall 1974).

[4]George Eliot, *Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), p.769. All further page references to *Middlemarch* are taken from this edition and will be included in the main text.

When Mr Bambridge stations himself under the archway of the Green Dragon he precipitates an episode in *Middlemarch* which is particularly illustrative of the narrative techniques which constitute the realism of *Middlemarch*. The episode begins with Bambridge standing alone and, a few pages later, the scene has become one of lively social activity within which the narrator places the reader. The voices of the characters, their concerns, the activity in the street; all these social details are included in the passage to establish certain representational claims. This social activity is the "reality" presupposed by the realism of the novel; the extent to which it achieves a concrete representation of this social reality is the extent to which the novel itself is realistic. As Auerbach might have put it, the characters and events are embedded in their background, and the gradual accumulation of Middlemarchers increases the depth and density of this background, augmenting the realism of the episode. The concentration of social activity around Bambridge further suggests that this kind of episode and the "realness" of the social are inevitable. It is, we are told, "certain" to occur, the very substance of Middlemarch life.

Close attention to the narrative techniques of this episode illustrates some of the complexities of how this social reality is concretized and represented. The archway of the Green Dragon acts as what Bakhtin would have called an important chronotope at which the narrative gathers itself. Moreover, it is a particularly suggestive image of the convergence of different elements of Middlemarch society. It is a threshold[5] between, obviously, the street and the yard of the Green dragon, but also between social categories such as respectability and disrepute. Like the Green Dragon itself, the archway bridges the gap between such categories, compromising and undermining them, placing them in dialogue with one another. As it becomes increasingly crowded, the archway acts as a kind of vortex of social discourse; Hopkins the draper, then miscellaneous other listeners, and finally Mr Hawley join Bambridge under the archway before Bulstrode passes and Bambridge relates the details of his fateful meeting with Raffles.

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[5] Bakhtin develops the idea of the chronotopic siginificance of the threshold in his analysis of Dostoevsky. The threshold, he suggests, is a particularly important chronotope because of its intermediary quality, it always evokes what is on either side of it; see, for example, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p.175 and p.299.

As the scene progresses, more important listeners congregate around Bambridge. The "importance" of these listeners, we presume, is to Bambridge, and as his social priority consequently decreases, the narrative focus moves away from his point of view and begins instead to assimilate his discourse, representing Bambridge rather than organizing the representation of the gathering through him:

> Gentlemen present were assured that when they could show him anything to cut out a blood mare, a bay, a rising four, which was to be see at Doncaster if they chose to go and look at it, Mr Bambridge would gratify them by being shot 'from here to Hereford'. Also, a pair of blacks which he was going to put into the break recalled vividly to his mind a pair which he had sold to Faulkner in '19 ... (p.769)

Here the narrator has partly adopted Mr Bambridge's way of speaking and, at the same time, also placed the narrative at an ironic distance from Bambridge's sales talk. The narrative is moving in two different directions: the accumulating crowd, and Bambridge's voice in the narrative place the reader within the social reality of Middlemarch, but the narrative shifts which accommodate different perspectives within this reality relativize each representational position.

When Mr Frank Hawley happens along, the narrative again shifts to accomodate him within the group. "He was not a man", we are told, "to compromise his dignity by lounging at the Green Dragon, but ..."(p.770). This we can understand as partly Hawley's own sense of himself - the narrative has again changed focus - and partly as a reflection of the informal stratification of Middlemarch society which takes its place within another stratum which extends to the gentry of the novel. Hawley's "dignity" is preserved by his commercial pretext and this recalls many other incidents in the novel where the scene, represented in concrete detail, is juxtaposed with a representation of the social construction of Middlemarch life. When, by chance, Bulstrode passes, Bambridge takes the opportunity to impart his "bit of curious information ... free of expense"(p.770).

At this stage, the direct discourse of the characters becomes more prominent. The narrative having established a variety of perspectives

from which to understand this scene, the voices are allowed more discursive space, and they are represented from outside the group. But the narrator's parenthetical comments are still particularly telling. At first, Hawley, whose commercial pretext allows him to join the group, stands a little apart, "with his back to the street"(p.770). The social distances which pervade Middlemarch society are evoked by the detailed description of physical distance. Mr Hawley has crossed the street, but he has not left it entirely. The images of movement and transition which accompany Hawley represent the many levels at which the social in *Middlemarch* is established by movements and exchanges.

When Bulstrode passes, however, and Bambridge takes the opportunity to tell his story, Hawley's position, literally and figuratively, changes. The narrator moves from representing Hawley as only provisionally part of the scene to quoting his series of increasingly familiar interrogatives. We are told that Hawley originally crossed the road "to ask the horse-dealer whether he had found the first-rate gig-horse which he had engaged to look for" (p.770). The narrative distance from the scene recreates Hawley's unwillingness fully to become part of the scene; Bambridge is "the horse-dealer" with a specific brief. After Bambridge casts his discursive bait, we hear Hawley's voice, and, significantly, he steps forward into the archway, and the increased physical proximity of the scene parallels the increasing social interests which are represented. The realism of the scene is also served by the details of Mr Hawley's interest; his casual movements - his hands in his pockets, his knitted brow - are detailed and the conversation is reported in its entirety. Hawley's engagement is represented as complete when he presses Bambridge for more information. "'Go on, Bambridge,' said Mr Hawley, insistently. 'What did this fellow say about Bulstrode?'"(p.771). Hawley addresses Bambridge by name, his original sense of him as the "horse-dealer" having given way to the more personal relationship suggested by the use of his name. Hopkins, too, finds his position altered. His trade has brought him into contact with the events of Raffles' death and he, therefore, also becomes part of the scene, his voice not only contributing to the representation of conversation but also providing extra details about the events.

By this time Bulstrode has passed this group, but the narrator briefly returns to that instant in order more comprehensively to represent the

complexity of this brief set of convergences. Bulstrode, whose chance appearance occasions the discussion which we have been examining, is also, by chance, thinking about the same events. The narrator adopts Bulstrode's uneasy faith that Providence would protect him and his interests. He had not, we are told, "confessed to himself that he had done anything" (p.772) to hasten Raffles' death, or, at least, it "was impossible to prove" (p.772) that he had. The weakness of Bulstrode's rationalization is emphasized not only by the irony of his error, of which we are aware because of our earlier view of this episode, but also because the narrator recreates Bulstrode's own internal doubt. Providence, even within his own professed moral scheme, owes him nothing. The image of not having confessed to himself evokes a dualism within Bulstrode - he is both judge and defendant - which is confirmed by his belief not that he was not guilty but, to continue with the juridical metaphor, that he would not be convicted.

The narrative complexity of this passage - the axiological shifts, the temporal changes - are an indication of the narrative complexity of the whole novel. To achieve a realistic representation of the social environment, the narrative moves to accomodate the reader essentially *within* the social environment, rather than trying to summarize or overview the social scenario.

Events like this, which work in a similar fashion, occur throughout *Middlemarch*. Public-houses are merely one kind of chronotope used to create narrative realism. Dinner-parties are another. It is a dinner-party, albeit a very small one, which introduces Casaubon to Dorothea, and into the story. Once again, the scene is narrated through subtle axiological and perspectival shifts. It begins in the middle of a conversation, and alternates the exchanges of the characters with free indirect discourse the focus of which moves almost imperceptibly. After Brooke's first outburst, the narrator recreates Dorothea's assessment of the environment, her awe of Casaubon, condescension towards Chettam, and embarrassment over Brooke. There is, however, a trace of irony in the narrator's voice, particularly insofar as Dorothea's comparison of Casaubon to the portrait of Locke is concerned.

Later in the episode, this irony is beginning to speak for itself more audibly, and Dorothea's misapprehension of Chettam's (original) interests and intentions regarding her and her sister is juxtaposed with her own point of view. Later still, after Casaubon's description of his research, the narrator's tone has changed distinctly. The contrast between Brooke and Casaubon is partly a reflection of Dorothea's earlier discomfort, but owes more to a move away from the scene, taking Casaubon's and Brooke's comments out of their immediate context. Casaubon's precise speech is compared to a "public statement" (p.40), and he is pointedly contrasted to Brooke who, of course, is the one who will eventually be called upon to make a public statement. Thereafter, however, the narrator returns to Dorothea, and by abandoning the "precision" of earlier comments, expands the narrative perspective. Whereas previously, the narrative focus was, to a certain extent, a matter of inference, the narrator now chooses to signal it more clearly:

> Dorothea said to herself that Mr Casaubon was the most interesting man she had ever seen, not excepting even Monsieur Liret, the Vaudois clergyman who had given conferences on the history of the Waldenses. To reconstruct a past world, doubtless with a view to the highest purposes of truth - what a work to be in any way present at, to assist in, though only as a lamp-holder.(p.40)

The narrative, which previously relied upon Dorothea's perspective, is now placed at a distance - Dorothea said to herself - which ironizes her reflections. The irony is reinforced by the hyperbole of her observations - the *most* interesting man, more so *even* than M. Liret. There are, additionally, several oblique references, such as Dorothea's attraction to the persecuted, and, of course, her function later in the novel as an actual lamp-holder.

This social scene, like that which takes place outside the Green Dragon is rendered in concrete detail through a kind of narrative fluidity. The full resonance of the environment, its "realness," cannot be achieved through simple objective representation but requires a negotiation between different perspectives, as well as between direct and indirect discourse.

With the introduction of Mrs Cadwallader, as well as Chettam and Casaubon, the number of social locations increases, as the world of the text reaches out to encompass Freshitt Hall and Lowick Manor, each of which acts as a kind of narrative knot. The peripatetic Mrs Cadwallader is particularly interesting. Her social mobility, according to the narrator, creates little "thought and speech vortices" (p.83) which sustain her. The various locations which are gradually revealed to the reader act in a similar fashion. Each location serves to create a strong sense of social activity, and the narrative recreates a sense of that activity, a perspective which allows the reader to appreciate the scene in concrete detail.

Shortly before the Casaubons leave for Rome, there is another dinner-party at Tipton which serves, at that point, to broaden the social horizon of the novel, by bringing Middlemarchers and the landed gentry together, and to introduce a second significant narrative development, the story of Lydgate. The range of representational sites, or chronotopes, is accordingly expanded. Not only are more characters introduced, but the social horizon is broadened. As a result of Brooke's dinner-party, we are introduced to Bulstrode, and so to the bank and the hospital; to Vincy, and so to his house and breakfast- and dinner-tables, and, indirectly, to Stone Court, the Garths' house; and to recurrent social themes, such as the distinction between coursing and hunting. Breakfast tables, dinner-parties, sitting rooms, and public houses are all sites of important social occasions and environments which allow the narrative to develop a concrete representation of social life. Even Reverend Farebrother's drawing-room and study are evoked in extensive detail, a parallel being drawn between the environment and its inhabitants (p.198).

The importance of the social as a kind of realistic horizon is reinforced not only by the repeated evocations of social environments, but also by strong narrative parallels between different episodes. At the Green Dragon alone, parallel episodes can be seen. Many other characters are drawn into the Green Dragon under similar circumstances to those which bring Hawley and Bambridge together. Lydgate, Fred and young Hawley find themselves at the Green Dragon on another occasion. Lydgate, for different reasons to Fred and Mr Hawley, is also seeking Bambridge to trade in horses and decides that to "run up to the billiard-room, as he was passing, would save time."(p.722) But there is a contrast between this

time-saving, which comes to us as a judgement on Lydgate's part, and the social view of the Green Dragon with which we have just been presented; who goes there, how they are regarded, what happens there, what, in short, is "generally known in Middlemarch" (p.721) of the Green Dragon. The social becomes a general method for comprehending reality. Moreover, the Green Dragon is not the only pub in the area. Fred, for example, is mixed up with Bambridge, not at the Dragon but at the Red Lion in Houndsley but, like Hawley and Lydgate, has a pretext; the "sustaining power of nomenclature ... determined that the pursuit of these things was 'gay' "(p.269).

The broadening of the social environment, then, deepens the contextualizing of the reader. What Lukács might have called the "immersion" of the reader in the reality of the text is not a simple matter of representing the truth of events but rather a process of asserting the "reality" of the social and then recreating the complex movements of social activity. Not only is the social environment "broadened" but it is also "deepened" through a series of temporal returns. We have seen how the scene outside the Green Dragon relies upon such a narrative manoeuvre, but it is worth noting the extensive use of narrative return.

Many of the early chapters begin with a sense of diachronic temporal progression. Chapter 12, for example, begins with Fred and Rosamond taking their planned ride to Stone Court: "The ride to Stone Court, which Fred and Rosamond took the next morning ..."(p.131). Following Fred's interview with Featherstone, the narrative progresses to Mr Vincy's intercession on his behalf, and "the next morning a letter came" (p.161). Similarly, Lydgate attends Vincy's dinner-party, and "the next evening" (p.198), he visits Farebrother. "Some weeks" (p.207) later, the vexed question of the hospital chaplaincy then arises for Lydgate. Things happen, and are represented as taking place, one after the other.

Chapter 19, however, marks a significant change. As we have seen, the occasion of Dorothea's engagement to Casaubon facilitates a spatial shift from country to town. Dorothea becomes a topic of conversation and then, we are told, leaves for Rome, following which Middlemarch and its affairs become the representational focus. In Chapter 19 we return to Dorothea, although she is now in Rome. The introduction to Dorothea in Rome

departs from the narrative habit of placing events into a temporal sequence, and begins instead to communicate a sense of simultaneity:

> When George the Fourth was still reigning over the privacies of Windsor, when the Duke of Weliington was Prime Minister, and Mr Vincy was mayor of the old corporation in Middlemarch, Mrs Casaubon, born Dorothea Brooke, had taken her wedding journey to Rome.(p.219)

Not only are the events of the story thus temporally correlated, but the story itself is placed into a series of historical contemporaneities. The expanding space, as it were, of the novel is thus complemented by a deepening temporal structure. At the same time as the events in and around Middlemarch are taking place, and the narrator is leading the reader through them, elsewhere, inside and outside, other events are taking place. That this change of temporal representation takes place in Rome is not accidental. Rome provokes greatly different responses from each of the three characters involved in this particular plot-line. Casaubon fails to appreciate it, Ladislaw revels in it, and Dorothea fails to understand it. Rome, we might say, is a particularly fraught chronotope, and the hermeneutic significance of Rome has often been critically noticed.[6] It is, however, worth considering briefly what, specifically, it is about Rome which is so challenging:

> The weight of unintelligible Rome might lie easily on bright nymphs to whom it formed a background for the brilliant picnic of Anglo-foreign society; but Dorothea had no such defence against deep impressions. Ruins and basilicas, palaces and colossi, set in the midst of a sordid present, where all that was living and warm-blooded seemed sunk in the deep degeneracy of a superstition divorced from reverence ... (p.225)

Rome, essentially, is *too* historically concentrated, there is too much history still present, and both history (as Dorothea understands it) and the present are complicated by their proximity to one another. "Rome, the city

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[6]For a recent and particularly relevant discussion of Rome in *Middlmarch*, see David Carroll, *George Eliot and the Conflict of Interpretations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp.244ff.

of visible history" (p.224), acts as a kind of symbol of the novel's own use of simultaneity.

As we have seen with regard to the episode ouside the Green Dragon, the narrator begins to make use of temporal returns to deepen the social environment. Bulstrode passes the Green Dragon, and the following conversation is represented, and then we return to the moment of Bulstrode's passing by. That episode, of course, takes place fairly late in the novel; it is with the return to Dorothea that narrative simultaneity really begins to feature.

When Dorothea is "found" sobbing in her boudoir, the narrative, which previously has been moving generally forward, begins essentially to move backwards in time. From Dorothea's tears we return to previous events, most notably the argument between Dorothea and Casaubon, and then return to Dorothea crying in her boudoir, whereupon Will makes his first visit.

After the narrative then returns to Middlemarch, and to Fred Vincy, the story progresses through Fred's illness to the romance between Lydgate and Rosamond. Pursuing this development in the story, the narrative finds them coincidentally together on the Lowick Road where Sir James' man intercepts him, requesting him to attend Casaubon:

> Only a few days later, when he (Lydgate) had happened to overtake Rosamond on the Lowick Road and had got down from his horse to walk by her side until he had quite protected her from a passing drove, he had been stopped by a servant on horseback with a message calling him in to a house of some importance where Peacock had never attended. The servant was Sir James Chettam's and the house was Lowick Manor.(p.305)

Once again, the focus shifts from town affairs to those of the gentry, and the narrative returns to Casaubon and Dorothea at a point antecedent to Lydgate's and Rosamond's meeting, tracing a different sequence of events leading up to Lydgate's attendance on Casaubon. The tension within Dorothea's mariage, the textual antithesis between Ladislaw and Casaubon, as well as Celia's engagement are introduced, and then, the narrator returns to the point in time which was reached in what might be

called the other plot of the novel. The contrast between the two representations of the same moment highlights the complexities which are introduced through the use of narrative simultaneity:

> So Mr Lydgate was sent for and he came wonderfully soon, for the messenger, who was Sir James Chettam's man and knew Mr Lydgate, met him leading his horse along the Lowick Road and giving his arm to Miss Vincy.(p.318)

This kind of temporal reversal promotes what we might call narrative density. As we have seen, the applicability of Bakhtin's notion of the chronotope to the narrative of *Middlemarch* is one way in which the representational methods of the novel might be illustrated. The narrative gathers around particular locations, using them to familiarize the reader with the world of the text, to enter, as it were, the society of the novel. Other theoretical descriptions are also helpful. The spatial and temporal fabric of the novel is what Lukács might have called a totality, the reality of the novel is established through the interrelation of all its constituent parts, the different places and different lives are represented as parts of a whole. Each representational figure, each character and location, is embedded in a social background, which is not merely a kind of backdrop to what the novel represents, but actually enables the concrete representations of the novel to emerge as such. The realism of the novel, then, depends upon a model of reality which is constituted by the social world. Such a world, however, is not simply *given* by the narrative, it is not simply a matter of representing the way things are in Middlemarch. There is certainly a certain degree of unreflective faith in the social world represented *in* the novel, Mrs Cadwallader's warning to "call things by the same name as other people call them" (p.581) and Mrs Plymdale's distrust of strangers (p.329) are particularly pointed examples of how the social world is not only real but can also be said, in Lukácsian terms, to have become reified. But the narrative doesn't rely upon any sort of objectivity of the social world. It posits the social world through, as we have seen, narrative shifts and negotiations, greater or lesser assimilation of the direct speech of the characters, and through the accumulation of different but parallel examples of social behaviour. Repetition and parallels are evident at almost every level of the narrative; characters and their values are compared, and narrative topoi are repeated. There are, for example, three love problems, which goes towards suggesting the ubiquitousness of

courtship rituals, not merely as an individual concern, but as a social one. The characters and the events in which they participate are represented as being embedded in a larger, transpersonal social fabric, many metaphors for which can be traced in the novel. In a sense, the social realism of the novel does not work through exhaustive coverage of the social world, but rather through a kind of circular negotiation between positing the social as an epistemological category, and then textually recreating it.

But this kind of realistic circle is not unbroken. To evoke a sense of social reality, the text, as we have seen, relies upon a series of chronotopes which organize the narrative, and make possible its development. Social gatherings, public-houses, and so forth, serve both to evoke the social and to contract the events of the narrative into a coherent pattern. As this narrative consistency is achieved, the social function of these organizational centres, or events, is brought into relief. The synthetic world in and around Middlemarch, then, acts as a kind of critical examination of the very idea of the social upon which it relies, and therefore the epistemological status of the social is similarly brought under the critical microscope.

That the real is conflated with the social, thus making possible the realism of *Middlemarch*, leads to an examination of the synthetic structure of the social. The possible contribution of a critical reading of *Middlemarch* to such an examination, is what we now turn to.

(b) "By Jove, Nick, it's you !": the social function of chance

If we return to the events outside the Green Dragon, we can see how both realism and other aspects of the novel make their presence felt at the same time. This social event, as we have seen, is not entirely accidental, it is exactly the kind of thing which frequently occurs. Thus, we have, on the one hand, the familiarity and regularity of social life in Middlemarch. On the other hand, we have the *particulars* of this particular meeting, which rely, to say the least, on chance.

The chance meeting of Bambridge and Hawley, as well as Bulstrode's passing by, allow the narrative to be, as it were, realistic. But this realistic episode makes possible an important plot development which contributes

to the overall narrative design of the novel. Now, the intricate plot of the novel, in many ways, is not at all realistic, and it is equally importantly served by this passage as the realistic ends of the novel. This, in turn, contributes to potential moral implications of the novel. Bulstrode's fate, for example, bears upon Lydgate's, which makes Lydgate's marriage to Rosamond an object of analysis which then invites comparison with other relationships in the story, bringing the very ideas of marriage and gender relations to the foreground of inquiry.

The scene in the archway of the Green Dragon, then, serves mixed ends. The attention to social detail places this scene within a realistic mode of representation within the novel. But this same scene contributes to the extraordinary series of coincidences which make possible the development and resolution of the plot which acts as a vehicle for other achievements of the novel. The episode is an evocation of the social, which is marked by a sense of familiarity, regularity and inevitability. Bambridge, whose trade, habits, and social standing - in short, his identity - are bound to social customs, relies upon the social. He does not, we know, like to be alone, but he knows that he will not be long alone in such circumstances. Yet, at the same time, the episode also includes information regarding what doesn't happen very often: the coincidence of Bulstrode, Rigg, Raffles, and Ladislaw sharing a curiously eventful history. It is, at once, both typical and atypical, it represents the ordinary and encompasses the extraordinary. The singularity of the novel's plot sits alongside the regularity of its realism.

This is, perhaps, the most important feature of this passage: it serves its mixed ends simultaneously, and relies upon chance in the service of both. Within the one scene, different interpretive emphases are possible, rather than one or another predominating. This, I suggest, is the case with *Middlemarch* as a whole. Alongside what we can call its realism, there are melodramatic, mythical, and ethical implications, each of which may be critically explored. Just as the novel's social realism and its decidedly artificial plot, or at least one strand of it, are equally represented in the passage with which we have been concerned, *Middlemarch* operates in a number of different representational modes.

But these different ends or modes, of course, cannot be so neatly divided, nor can they be simply counterposed to one another. In *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot's last novel, there is, perhaps, a clearer distinction between the different representational ends pursued in that particular novel, between, for example, the representation of Gwendolen's enthusiasm for hunting and of Deronda's conversations with the mystically-inclined Mordecai. In *Middlemarch*, however, the different ends of the novel are often served by the same textual techniques and devices.

In the episode with which we started, as I have said, the element of chance is particularly important. It is chance which brings together Bambridge and Raffles, then Hawley, and, finally, Bulstrode. Chance, then, makes possible or at least contributes to the realistic depth of this scene. Hawley, we are told, happened to be passing, and Bulstrode might, after all, have been "'the Riverstone Coach'"(p.770). These events assimilate the random into the narrative, but while they may be accidental they are certainly not astonishingly so. That Hawley and Bulstrode are passing is quite plausible, quite realistic. It is, of course, a street, along which people, and the Riverstone Coach, will inevitably pass.

Chance pervades the novel. Countless other incidents in the novel happen, as it were, by accident. Shortly after Dorothea and Casaubon confirm their engagement, Casaubon, leaving Tipton Grange, happens to cross paths with Mrs Cadwallader, who after a short exchange with the housekeeper, then uses her new and accidentally acquired information in her conversation with Brooke and Celia (p.75ff). When Fred is ill, Rosamond sees Lydgate, "stopping to speak to some one.'"(p.293). When Casaubon is ill, Sir James sends his man for him, and once again, Lydgate is bumped into, this time accompanying Rosamond, a consequence, at least in part, of his attendance on Fred (p.318).

But while these accidental occurrences are unobtrusive, and often serve to introduce scenes which provide opportunities to advance the realistic dimensions of the novel, chance sometimes works in quite a different fashion. When Bulstrode passes the group at the Green Dragon he, to labour the point, happens to be thinking of the very circumstances the details of which Bambridge has come across. These circumstances - Bulstrode's first marriage, Featherstone's illegitimate son, Raffles, and so

forth - of course, *are* so coincidental as to be highly unlikely or implausible. Whereas the chance meeting of Bambridge and Hawley, and so forth, is realistic, the element of chance in the plot is not. Not only are Bulstrode and Ladislaw, to limit the participants to just two, tenuously connected, but Raffles' persistence in and around Middlemarch owes itself to the happy accident of his flask being loose in its covering and his using the stray letter from Bulstrode to Rigg to secure it (pp.452-3).

Chance in *Middlemarch* is double-edged. On many occasions it makes possible the attention to social detail which increases the depth of realism in the novel and it allows the narrative to move from scene to scene - Hawley, for example, rushes to Lowick to discuss the matter with Farebrother - which broadens the realism of the novel by allowing it to encompass a kind of panorama of social scenery. But it also motivates the various lines of plot development, often unrealistically, which lends the novel its didactic, sentimental, and allegorical dimensions. But this double-edge is more complicated than merely something which can "cut both ways." Certainly, we can see chance playing an important part in aspects of the novel which might be considered antithetical, it works, we might say, in different directions. But it is also working, in a sense, unidirectionally. Chance clearly has a place in the social world, making possible certain social events and activities. In a sense, it acts to determine the social world; once it has played its part, the progress of social activity is less random. It also contributes to the narrative's capacity to recreate the social world, occasioning social events, and bringing different characters into contact with one another. It acts as a narrative device which organizes the novel. But it also slides from this level of organization or determination into what we might call overdetermination. Aspects of the plot are *too* chancy, and thus they go through the socially realistic aspect of the novel into others, into those aspects which are, on the one hand, concerned with moral questions, and, on the other, those which clearly mark *Middlemarch* as bound by particular conventions of narrative and fiction.

The kind of differences implicit in the treatment of chance in *Middlemarch* are evident in other concepts of which the novel makes use. There is a similarly equivocal use made of myth throughout the novel. At times, myth is evoked as a symbolic parallel to the events of the novel,

and at other times it becomes material for the novel. Casaubon's *magnum opus*, of course, is an effort to rationalize, to unify, the implications of mythology, but the different uses made of myth in the novel constitute one of the reasons why his task is inevitably unsuccessful.

Because the possibility of tracing antithetical implications of features of *Middlemarch* extends to central features of how the novel achieves its realism, the realism of the novel in general becomes similarly ambivalent. Just as chance contributes both to the realism of the novel and to elements of the plot which disrupt that realism, the realistic tendencies of the novel rely upon a certain model of reality and yet seem to interrogate that model. This, I suggest, is the theoretical interest of realism in general, and particularly in *Middlemarch* there is a kind of ambivalence which prevents the novel from being understood too simply. Everything which contributes to the realism of the novel, both general devices such as the assimilation of chance and specific passages and events in the novel, can simultaneously be pursued to quite different but equally supportable conclusions. If chance is one idea with which we might explore this tendency in the novel, there is another which is, perhaps, even more complicated.

(c) The import of the word: language, the social, and realism

Theorists such as Bakhtin, as we have seen, make particularly productive use of the idea of language. In my analysis of Bakhtin, I have tried to show that Bakhtin's theory of language and of literature derives from his sense of language as an index of the social relations which constitute the human world. Literature, particularly the novel, is then a further refinement of his theoretical focus. Language acts as an index of the social and relational quality of existence, and the novel as an illustration of the complexities of language and as a means of relating language to the social world.

If we return, once again, to the events at the Green Dragon, the relevance of these ideas to *Middlemarch* can be explored more fully. One of the key elements of this episode is, in a very broad sense, language. The narrator suggests that gossip is to Middlemarch society as food is to pigeons; it is "mental sustenance"(p.769) When the narrator allows Bambridge's perspective of these events to be most evident in the narrative, the value

of language, or rather discourse, is clear. When he is joined by Hopkins, the roving narrator settles into Bambridge's social purview. Bambridge shows the draper scant regard, the narrator tells us that Bambridge feels that "Hopkins was of course glad to talk to *him*, but that he was not going to waste much of his talk on Hopkins."(p.769) Bambridge's concern to *conserve* his speech is particularly telling. It implies that social activity is a kind of commerce, discourse is a resource which must be wisely and profitably put to use. When Bulstrode passes, Bambridge offers "a bit of curious information ... free of expense", and adds that when first he picked Raffles up, he "slipped through ... (his) fingers" (p.770). These phrases of Bambridge's reinforce his sense that his "bragging showed a fine sense of the marketable."(p.771).

The social value of gossip is asseverated by repetition throughout the novel. Hawley sends a clerk to Stone Court, who speaks to Mrs Abel, and Hawley then becomes a vehicle for the information. In many other episodes, a similar reliance upon gossip is represented as integral to Middlemarch life. When Dorothea and Celia are discussing Chettam's matrimonial intentions, Celia's predilection for gossip once again brings gossip to the fore as a figure of the relationship between language and the social:

> 'Pray do not make that mistake any longer, Dodo. When Tantripp was brushing my hair the other day, she said that Sir James's man knew from Mr Cadwallader's maid that Sir James was to marry the eldest Miss Brooke.'
> 'How can you let Tantripp talk such gossip to you, Celia ?' said Dorothea, indignantly, not the less angry because details asleep in her memory were now awakened to confirm the unwelcome revelation. 'You must have asked her questions. It is degrading.'
> 'I see no harm at all in Tantripp's talking to me. It is better to hear what people say ... (pp.58-59)

The conversation between the two sisters is thus set against the background of general social conversation. Gossip is not only what they talk about, but it intrudes into their own apprehension of Middlemarch society. Dorothea's sleeping suspicions, or, rather, suspicions which she refuses to countenance, are confirmed by the gossip which reflects the general social view of the situation about which she and Celia are

speaking. This brief exchange is placed in a broader and deeper social context - it extends, in a sense, horizontally to Sir James, and is deepened by the presence of the gossip of the servants, which is a crucial element of the realism of the novel. Each figure in the novel, each character or event, is understood as part of a larger social whole; it is gossip which makes this understanding possible.

Elsewhere, we see similar use made of gossip. At Brooke's dinner party, Dorothea's exit from the dining-room occasions a discussion about women in general amongst several prominent Middlemarchers (p.115); a similar gathering, this time at Mr Toller's, exchanges news about Lydgate (p.690); and peripatetic Mrs Cadwallader is an extremely important conduit of gossip. At the Tankard in Slaughter Lane, another tavern, Mrs Dollop presides over similar exchanges of opinion. When Lydgate becomes the subject of discussion, Mrs Dollop asserts, as "a known 'fac' that he had wanted to cut up Mrs Goby"(p.481). Mrs Dollop's misuse of the word fact is an indication of how language, or at least gossip, takes on a kind of a life of its own.

Dinner parties, sitting-rooms, and public houses, which, as we have seen, contribute greatly to the realism of the novel, are also significant insofar as they are where the social life of Middlemarch is made verbal. The circulation of gossip allows the novel to place its story within a broad social context which extends from the estates of the late Georgian aristocracy to the various strata of commercial society in a developing manufacturing centre, from professionals to traders to the clergy. It is one agent, we might say, of realism in the novel, attesting to the social embeddedness of the story.

However, like Mrs Dollop's "known 'fac'", there are limits to the "truth" of gossip. The epigraph to Chapter 71, with which we started this discussion, is an interesting allusion to these limits. Pompey and Froth, before the wise arbiter Escalus, are telling their tale of events which happened at the Venetian counterpart to the Green Dragon. The epigraph ends with Pompey's wish that "here be truths." But, of course, "here" be nothing like the truth. The judicial proceedings are frustrated by Elbow's pervasive misuse of words. Trying to make his case to Escalus, Elbow inverts his words, saying the opposite, although only just, of what he

means. Elbow's ineptitude illustrates the malleability of language, of truth, and, finally, of authority. In *Measure for Measure*, these ideas are "problems," for this play is commonly regarded as a "problem play." But in *Middlemarch*, the representational ends of which are very different to that of the drama, these ideas, upon which realism might be said to rely, are no less problematic. Gossip, for example, the circulation of half-truths at the green Dragon, or the Tankard, is, of course, one kind of language use. The gossip, as we have seen, contributes to the realism of the novel, but it also brings the problem of truth in language to the fore, a point which is reinforced by other reflections on language in the novel.

In the Garth kitchen, a very telling conversation takes place. "'I hate grammar. What's the use of it ?'" (p.276) asks young Ben Garth of his mother. To which she replies, with "severe precision", that it provides the standard of correct speech and writing, the instruments of accurate communication. Should Ben, she asks, "like to speak as old Job does ?" (p.277).

> 'Yes', said Ben stoutly; 'it's funnier. He says, "Yo Goo" - that's just as good as "you go".'
> 'But he says, "A ship's in the garden", instead of a sheep",' said Letty, with an air of superiority. 'You might think he meant a ship off the sea.'
> 'No you mightn't, if you weren't silly,' said Ben. 'How could a ship off the sea come there ?'(p.277)

As Mrs Garth points out, Ben's reasoning is not entirely convincing. The conversation between Ben and Letty is about pronunciation, rather than grammar, and Job, Mrs Garth maintains, need not be overly concerned with either punctuation or grammar because he "has only to speak about very plain things"(p.277).

This brief, comic exchange between the younger Garths is not of great consequence. It represents a familiar feature of the family life of the Garths; recurring frequently and paralleling a similar theme in the other important Middlemarch family, the Vincys. It also implies, perhaps, something about the position of the Garths in provincial society; on the one hand, the younger Garths are schooled at home, and Mary and Christy are self-supporting, while on the other, Mrs Garth's attitude towards old Job seems some what unreflective. But, once again, we can see antithetical

possibilities of the incorporation of language into the novel. The conversation between the Garths contributes to the realism of the novel; it is a strong evocation of their family life, and places their situation in the broader social context of the period. The parallels between the Garths and the Vincys, to whom we shall shortly turn, are particularly important in this respect. The social differences and distance between them struggle, of course, against Fred and Mary's irresistible romance, but the similarities between their family lives also reinforce a kind of commonality between them. This commonality acts as a kind of resolution of social differences, suggesting, perhaps, something essential about social life. At the same time, the substance of the conversation highlights, once again, the malleability of language.

Letty and Mrs Garth insist upon the possibility of correct communication, an exact science of langauge which, if one is sufficiently schooled, allows one to say exactly what one is thinking. Grammar is one of Mrs Garth's "favourite ancient paths", and she is trying to instruct Ben in the appreciation of what she calls "the import of the word as conveying unity or plurality of idea" (p.276). Words, however, convey *both* unity and multiplicity of idea, and Ben's fragmented response is one instance in the novel of how this seeming antithesis is borne out.

For Ben, the *context* of an utterance is all important. Accurate grammar, or pronunciation, is no match, he argues, for "not being silly." While Letty wants to *explain* Job's simple speech, which can't be done according to the rules of grammar and punctuation with which she is being educated, Ben claims that he can *understand* what Job says - by considering a statement and its context he is able to *interpret* Job's statement, and realize that it refers to a sheep, not a ship.

As their lesson continues Ben begins to tell the story of Cincinnatus, interrupted periodically by Letty, intent upon rendering the details "straight on, as mother told it ..."(p.277). Ben's rendition is full of what we might call contextualizations - "he was a farmer ... he was ploughing ... he was a wise man, like my father ..."(p.277). For Ben these details constitute the reality of Cincinnatus, particularly insofar as he is able to identify him with his father. Ben gives a scattered account of events:

> 'Well - oh - well - why, there was a great deal of fighting, and they were all blockheads, and - I can't tell it just how you told it - but they wanted a man to be captain and king and everything -'(p.278)

When Letty interrupts to provide the correct appelation for such a man, Ben reasserts the ambiguity of language - dictator, he says, is not a good word because of its other potential meaning. Ben's obvious struggle with the story is particularly interesting. On the one hand, his sense of the ambiguity of language leads him to break up the original story, he cannot really understand it because he cannot place it in relation to himself. On the other hand, language is, of course, the vehicle of meaningful communication and his struggle to render the story of Cincinnatus gives rise to his embellishments which place the story in a context that is meaningful to him. He initiates what Bakhtin might have called a dialogue between his own position and the story, rather than accepting the representational authority of the story.

As I have mentioned, another pair of siblings, Fred (whose arrival at the Garths' house brings the exchange between Ben and Letty into the narrative) and Rosamond Vincy hold a similar debate.

> '... All choice of words is slang. It marks a class.'
> 'There is correct English: that is not slang.'
> 'I beg your pardon : correct English is the slang of prigs who write history and essays. And the strongest slang of all is the slang of poets.'
> 'You will say anything, Fred, to gain your point.'
> 'Well, tell me whether it is slang or poetry to call an ox a *leg-plaiter*.'
> 'Of course you can call it poetry if you like.'
> 'Aha, Miss Rosy, you don't know Homer from slang ...' (p.126)

Fred insists upon the malleability of language, upon social and generic registers which militate against an absolute standard of correct English. Fred and Rosy continue to bicker:

> 'I don't make myself disagreeable; it is you who find me so. Disagreeable is a word that describes your feeling and not my actions.'
> 'I think it describes the smell of grilled bone.'

> 'Not at all. It describes a sensation in your little nose associated with certain finicking notions which are the classics of Mrs Lemon's school...'(127)

Here, Fred is arguing that the meaning of 'disagreeable' is contextual; a discourse between his actions and Rosy's feelings, between the smell of grilled bone and Rosy's finishing school education. His juxtaposition of language and the sense of smell reinforces his participatory view of language. To recall some of the theoretical characterizations of this kind of view, we might say that the word disagreeable, over which Fred and Rosy disagree doesn't *describe* the smell of grilled bone, but *narrates* it, placing it in the dialogic context of Rosy's education and Fred's predilection for late, hot breakfasts. Fred, like Ben, is a contextualist, and not only with regard to language. His actions, too, vary according to their context. He can get up early to go hunting because, he says, he likes it, while on other days, he simply can't get up early. Fred is lacking, perhaps, in rationale, but not in rhetoric.

These debates, such as they are, resonate with another episode in the novel during which Will Ladislaw and his German artist friend, Naumann, animated by Dorothea's presence in Rome, debate the relative merits of language and painting as media of representation. Will maintains that "'... painting and Plastik are poor stuff after all ... Language is a finer medium'"(p.222). He goes on to say that "'Language gives a fuller image, which is all the better for being vague ...'"(p.222). While Naumann seems to have great faith in his representational powers, Will argues that representation is always somehow imperfect. While, of course, we must read his argument in the light of his incipient romance with Dorothea, Will speaks of movement and tone, differences, mercuriality, ephemerality - qualities, he argues, which resist representation, or at least problematize it.

What follows is also interesting. In Naumann's studio, Casaubon and Dorothea are entreated to pose as studies for Aquinas and Santa Clara, to which they assent. The irony of Ladislaw's and Naumann's machinations aside, and "Naumann's jokes at the expense of Mr Casaubon", this episode, like the debates between Fred and Rosy, Ben and Letty, reinforces a suggestion in the novel that questions of representation are neither easily nor readily answered.

Language, as these examples suggest, serves an important but equivocal function in the representational scheme of *Middlemarch*. The novel makes its representation in language but it also concentrates upon language, undermining the possibility of authoritative representation. Furthermore, language, itself is an important element of the "reality" of Middlemarch life. From the gossip which takes the story from the streets of the town to the parlours of the gentry, to the artistic debates between Ladislaw and Naumann, the ways in which people speak to one another becomes an important part of the novel's representation of social life.

This last point warrants further attention. In an early episode of the novel, Brooke, Chettam, and the newly-arrived Casaubon, as well as Dorothea and Celia, are dining at Tipton Grange. As with the episode at the Green Dragon, which is prefaced by the lines from *Measure for Measure*, the famous debate between Don Quixote and Sancho Panza which introduces this chapter heightens the complexity of the scenes which follow.

The narrator introduces this scene *in media res*, in the middle of Brooke's conversation. Brooke and Casaubon are counterposed to one another; at a later stage, Brooke claims Will Ladislaw, who is more explicitly Casaubon's textual foil, as an alter ego (p.551). An index of the differences between Casaubon and Brooke, is their verbal manner. Brooke is profligate in his use of language, his "impetuous reason" (p.39) generates several habits of speech which indicate the waywardness of his thoughts; his "having gone into" various matters, "having known" historical persons, randomly acquired and recalled bits of information with which he peppers his conversation. These traits are well-known in Middlemarch; Mrs Cadwallader, regarding Brooke's acquiescence in Dorothea's first marriage, bitterly remarks, "as if you could ever squeeze a resolution out of Brooke"(p.82), and Lydgate calls him "a leaky-minded fool"(p.695). Certainly, Brooke's "impetuosity" when it comes to speaking has no greater testament than when he threatens to include Virgil in his wide circle of acquaintances (p.78).

By contrast, Casaubon is one of the characters in the novel whose commitment to one or another model of essential truth is dramatized in the story. Dorothea's "plans," and Lydgate's search for the primitive tissue are the other important examples of this aspect of the novel, what might

be called the St. Theresa principle. Like Theresa, Casaubon has here come across "domestic reality ... in the shape of uncles"(p.25), or at least Dorothea's uncle, and Brooke's frustration of Casaubon's higher pursuits is evident in the discourse over the dinner table.

Again, the conversation between the diners is an element of the realism of the novel. Each personality is presented in the context of this very ordinary social occasion. However, we see again the way in which this realistic device is also typical of the simultaneous analysis of its own features which is evident in the novel. That Brooke and Casaubon see things as differently as Don Quixote and Sancho is represented by the conversation which takes place, or, rather, doesn't take place between them. Casaubon, as Celia later remarks, "talks very little"(p.41). Addressed by Brooke, his first response is as follows: "'No,' said Mr Casaubon, not keeping pace with Mr Brooke's impetuous reason"(p.39). He then goes on to deliver his speech regarding, among other things, his intention to reconstruct the ancient world "in spite of ruin and confusing changes"(p.40). His speech is what we might call monologic, it bears little relation to the remark which was addressed to him, and sits outside the dialogue. There is no verbal response to his precise statement, only Dorothea's mental response which is, of course, destined to be confuted.

The narrative then turns to Sir James' contribution to the conversation which is quintessentially social. He turns to engage Celia in the conversation. But Dorothea is not listening and, meanwhile, Mr Brooke continues to talk at Casaubon, who is similarly not listening. The narrative includes little of this background noise, but returns to it when Brooke again addresses Casaubon directly: "'... Do you know Wilberforce?'" (p.41). Whereas the previous question had occasioned Casaubon's delivery of a short monologue, the narrative this time emphasizes the lack of communication in this exchange: "Mr Casaubon said, 'No.'"(p.41) Brooke, of course persists with the conversation, and Mr Casauon's next response is paraphrased by the narrator: "Mr Casaubon bowed, and observed that it was a wide field"(p.41); his voice is now entirely withdrawn from the representation of this episode.

Conversation, in this episode, is an important figure, and, once again, serves mixed ends. The scenario is realistic, insofar as the characters are

placed in an ordinary social environment, and the conversation is a particularly important feature of this context. But the complexities of the way in which this conversation is represented, as well as the contrast between Casaubon and Brooke, makes that very social activity a subject of inquiry. Conversation is both an emblem of the social reality towards which this episode is intended and an analytic figure which allows this social reality to be the object of critical analysis. If we consider what might be called the verbal destinies of these two men, the point is reinforced.

On the one hand, Brooke's impetuous reason is a serious impediment to his reformative inclinations and his aspiration towards public life. The incident at Dagley's is, perhaps, the most telling indictment of Brooke's general ineptitude, of which his verbal inadequacy acts as a kind of symbolic index. The conversation between Dagley and Brooke, like that between Casaubon and Brooke, gets nowhere, but the incident takes place against Brooke's unease regarding unfavourable comments made about his attitudes and capacities as a landlord in a rival political newspaper. Accordingly, the narrator sets about describing Dagley's tenant farm in some detail, but dwells upon the differing interpretations of the scene, reflecting that Brooke's political context determines the way he sees Dagley's as "never ... before so dismal" (p.429) rather than as picturesque. The words of Sir James and the *Trumpet* speak across his apprehension of the scene, his own changed context bears upon the narrator's critique of the poor condition in which the rural poor live.

The narrative then places Dagley himself within his own context, he is "a figure in the landscape" (p.429), but Dagley's extravagance at the Blue Bull has compromised his willingness to remain so, and as Brooke draws physically nearer to Dagley and his environment, Dagley begins to become the determining voice in a verbal exchange, rather than a figure in the landscape at which Brooke is looking. Similarly, the narrator draws nearer to the events of this episode, allowing the voices of the characters to be heard. Again, a conversation is the basis of the realism of the scene; the way in which each speaks, Dagley's dialect, the tone and volume of their voices, the dog at Dagley's heels, Mrs Dagley's appearance and her chagrin towards Dagley, her wariness of the landlord, Dagley's fierceness towards her. All these elements which arise from Brooke's intention to speak to Dagley endow this episode with a depth of background which alludes to

the complex social environment in which the events of *Middlemarch* are set. Reality, as I have been arguing, is understood in this novel as a social environment which places people and events in a particular context in which they are to be understood. The events at Dagley's are a very pointed example of how the narrative evokes this context by concentrating upon social activity, or, more specifically, social discourse.

Once again, however, the presence of the social in this episode is ambivalent. Instead of the context of this exchange being entirely determined, as if it were a graphic representation of a landscape, the conversation between Dagley and Brooke presents two irreconcilable positions within this landscape. Once again, it is language which is the vehicle of this interpretive collision. Mr Brooke begins by addressing Dagley as "my good fellow" (p.430). Dagley's antagonistic response is to echo Brooke's supercilious words: "'Oh, ay I'm a good feller am I ? Thank ye, sir, thank ye,' said Dagley with loud snarling irony"(p.430). Brooke's next words reflect his utter incapacity to "converse" with Dagley:

> Your little lad Jacob has been caught killing a leveret, Dagley: I Have told Johnson to lock him up in the empty stable an hour or two, just to frighten him, you know. But he will be brought home by-and-by, before night: and you'll just look after him, will you, and give him a reprimand, you know? (p.430)

But while Brooke's words are phrased as a question, it is clear that he anticipates no response; his speech, in Bakhtinian terms, lacks answerability. He asks Dagley to "look after" the boy, and immediately suggests how this may be done. But in the charged relationship between Brooke and Dagley, between landowner and tenant in Georgian England, a vague phrase like "look after" is open to interpretation. While what Brooke actually says bespeaks a certain desire to appear the benevolent gentleman, Dagley hears a very different suggestion, and responds accordingly:

> 'No, I woon't: I'll be dee'd if I'll leather my boy to please you or anybody else, not if you was twenty landlords istid o' one, and that a bad 'un.'(p.430)

Not only do Dagley's words indicate the extent to which he and Brooke are not really speaking to one another but his reflection on Brooke's adequacy

as landlord adds another echoing voice to the chorus of similar sentiments which were troubling Brooke just before this incident.

The exchange continues in this fashion; turning to Mrs Dagley, Brooke says that he doesn't want them to "give him the stick," (although he assumes that he would be within his rights to make such a demand) and Dagley again responds as if Brooke were suggesting quite the opposite. Mrs Dagley emerges from her environment to stand in the doorway, and to ask, quite firmly, what her son has done. But when her voice enters the conversation it is quickly silenced by Dagley. Her incidental appearance adds to this social collision an extra dimension: Brooke, in his capacity as landlord is talking about property and propriety; Dagley, the tenant farmer, speaks of generations of hardship, and Mrs Dagley, who significantly emerges from her kitchen, is concerned with her domestic difficulties. Their different perspectives, concerns, and voices, never, in this episode, coincide. The most telling indication of their lack of communication is when Dagley, attacking Brooke, appeals to the "Rinform," the very idea and word upon which Brooke so relies.

The episode at Dagley's, then, highlights how the great attention to social detail works, simultaneously, in different ways. On the one hand, the narrative achieves a certain amount of realistic depth by including such details as where Dagley had been, what he had been doing, why Mrs Dagley appears, even the imitative actions of the two dogs. Moreover, the whole scene might be said to be entirely incidental. Certainly it doesn't contribute, like the episode outside the Green Dragon, to the plot, although it does contribute to the growing impression that Brooke's "miscellaneousness" is perhaps more serious than mere absent-mindedness. On the other hand, however, these social details exemplify the extent to which this social reality depends upon the perspectives of the participants, and their voices are a kind of index of the cohesion, or in this case "incohesion", of the social world. Dagley, by dint of being drunk, has managed to give expression to his usually "tongue-tied"(p.430) discontent; his "having his say" means that this particular conversation at once contributes to the realism of the novel through its attendant attention to social details, and yet by representing the dissonance between Brooke, Dagley, and Mrs Dagley also invites a critique of the very conditions of these social details.

Dagley's "loud, snarling irony"(p.430) is revisited when Brooke's efficacy as a public man and as a speaker is put to another, more challenging test: his speech before the electors of Middlemarch. Again, this episode is firmly embedded in a social context, and certainly in a specific historical context. Mr Brooke's public life, or rather prospective public life, must be understood within the discourse of electoral reform in the late Georgian era. The detail with which this episode is presented makes this contextualization very strong. Brooke and Ladislaw, discussing Brooke's election strategy, touch on many historical details such as Brooke's allusion to ten-pound householders. Additionally, an important divergence between Brooke and Ladislaw is also becoming apparent at this stage, a marked distinction between them which is best represented by the fact that Brooke's failure in public life occasions Ladislaw's own eventual success in that arena.

When Brooke and his allies gather at the White Hart, once again the narrative includes what seem to be incidental details but are also highly analytical references. The White Hart is, it seems, right in the middle of town; it overlooks the market-place, the surrounding streets lead towards it. While these are realistic descriptive details, they also allude to the negotiations and exchange which make up public life in Middlemarch. Bambridge, as we have seen, knows how to market his discourse; Brooke is about to try his hand at what Bambridge, later in the novel, does so successfully. The details and location are anything but neutral, and the suggestion that Brooke's speech is a kind of commerce, reinforced by his overview of the market-place, his commercial alliances with Plymdale and Vincy, as well as the general concern in the novel with negotiation and exchange, makes this very clear. Counterposed to Brooke at the White Hart are, of course, Hawley and his associates at the Green Dragon. In this casual reference the narrative conflates social life in Middlemarch, represented by the two taverns, with a broader view of historical and political reality. This, again, generates a realistic aspect to the narrative, but similarly, by establishing social life as a realistic horizon while simultaneously symbolizing the architectonics of social life, how it is made and what it is made of, the narrative becomes ambivalent. These two antithetical interpretive possibilities emerge from the same textual features.

Brooke's speech is exactly what we would expect:

> 'I am a close neighbour of yours, my good friends - you've known me on the bench a good while - I've always gone a good deal into public questions - machinery, now, and machine-breaking - you're many of you concerned with machinery, and I've been going into that lately ... (p.547)

Needless to say, Brooke, "[p]lying among his recollections in this way" (p.547), makes a poor speech. As he meanders along, however, a highly suggestive interruption emphasizes his shortcomings. The effigy of Brooke and a "parrot-like, Punch-voiced echo of his words" (p.547) which interrupt his speech are of dual significance. These reinforce the realistic dimension of this episode, they are an evocation of the kind of thing that happens at the hustings. But at the same time they contribute to the possible analysis and critique of this kind of social occasion, once again because, as in the case of Dagley, it is Brooke's speech, his language, which is being turned against him. The scene, which began as a speech, or perhaps a monologue, becomes a cacophony of heckling, Brooke's own voice, the mocking echo; "whistles, yells, bellowings, and fifes made all the greater hubbub because there was shouting and struggling to put them down"(p.549). Mr Brooke and his effigy, his "image" become, in a sense, indistinguishable, as the eggs begin to strike both of them indiscriminately.

This scene vindicates Mrs Cadwallader's warning to Brooke against standing for election. In response to Brooke's explanation of his sale of land to Catholics, itself linguistically interesting - "persecuted for not persecuting" - Mrs Cadwallader previsions what eventually befalls Brooke:

> 'There you go ! That is a piece of clap-trap you have got ready for the hustings. Now, *do not* let them lure you to the hustings, my dear Mr Brooke. A man always makes a fool of himself, speechifying: there's no excuse but being on the right side, so that you can ask a blessing on your humming and hawing. You will lose yourself, I forewarn you. You will make a Saturday pie of all parties' opinions, and be pelted by everybody.'(p.77)

Mrs Cadwallader's prediction is unerringly accurate; a Saturday pie is exactly what Brooke delivers to the electors of Middlemarch, and he is, indeed, pelted. Brooke's incapacity to speak coherently is an index of his general inadequacies. His use of language, on the one hand, makes possible the detail and depth of this scene, but at the same time, there is a conflation of public life and a social environment with language. Social life depends upon a process which is entirely unlike Brooke's manner of speaking. Will's comparative success in the novel, as the eventually requited lover and as a figure in public life, can be attributed to the fact that he, despite Brooke's determined patronage of him, is quite unlike Brooke. In Middlemarch, for example, he is an editor, his task is to negotiate in and with language, and in public life. Despite his apprehension of the malleability of language - evident in his debate with Naumann - he nonetheless concerns himself with its application. Will's impatience, anxiety, and, finally, anger in this episode are an implicit critique of Brooke's semantic dissoluteness.

But beyond Ladislaw, at what we might call the other end of the semantic scale, is of course Mr Casaubon. As the narrator suggests, Casaubon's manner of speaking provides a striking contrast to Brooke's:

> He delivered himself with precision, as if he had been called upon to make a public statement; and the balanced sing-song neatness of his speech, occasionally corresponded to by a movement of his head, was the more conspicuous from its contrast with good Mr Brooke's scrappy slovenliness. (p.40)

Casaubon's philosophy of language, which gives rise to his manner of speaking, is an example of what Bakhtin characterized as abstract objectivism. He writes that "*dead, written, alien language* is the true description of the language with which linguistic thought has been concerned."[7] Casaubon's expertise is in Greek and Latin, and he agrees to

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[7]See Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, p.73. We have seen above how abstract objectivism overlooks the social, interactive character of language which Bakhtin sees as the defining characteristic of language. Casaubon's shortcomings include, certainly, such an oversight. Were the application of Bakhtinian categories to be pursued, we might say that Brooke represents the other tendency in linguistics against which Bakhtin sets himself: individual subjectivism. Once again, the problem is a failure to comprehend the social quality of language, and Bakhtin's attribution of individual subjectivism to Romanticism makes Brooke's references to Shelley and Wordsworth particularly telling.

teach Dorothea the characters of these languages; constant reading, of course, threatens his eyesight. But Casaubon's problem, we might say, is not that his sight is deteriorating, or that his "taper stuck before him" (p.230) will never provide sufficient illumination. Casaubon's problem is not visual or optical, but verbal; it isn't that he cannot see, but that he cannot hear. Casaubon's problem, of course, is not *only* verbal, but his difficulties with language act as an index of his shortcomings in general. When Will criticizes Casaubon and his ambition, the substance of his critique is linguistic. Casaubon, we know, doesn't read German (p.240), and, in addition, he is not an Orientalist, and he seems to fail to appreciate that the subject of his study, is, according to Will, "as changing as chemistry" (p.254). He must cease, Will seems to be suggesting, to seek to see his material, as if it were an inert and entirely determined object, and begin to listen to it. Even Brooke hits the mark when he suggests that "'Casaubon has been a little too narrow ...'"(p.321).

Casaubon, however, won't listen; his own anxiety reveals this. His periodic communications on his subject, his parerga, which, he suspects, are not being read, are complicated by "the rivalry of dialectical phrases ringing against each other in his brain"(p.315). A misplaced dedication, he feels, has compromised his work, an uneasiness on Casaubon's part which reflects that the historicism of scholarship is something to which he is unable to reconcile himself.

The Casaubons' trip to Rome is the apogee of Casaubon's battle against "ruin and confusing change" (p.40). "[L]iving and warm-blooded"(p.225), Rome, as we have seen, becomes the setting for some of the novel's most poignant and pregnant moments. On the one hand, the wedding-journey to Rome is integrated thoroughly into the realistic dimension of the novel. There is an abundance of descriptive detail, as well as a plausible background to their arrival in Rome. On the other hand, this realistic location opens, once again, a variety of interpretive possibilities. The first is the difference in the responses to Rome of the principals. Will, we know, negotiates Rome with little difficulty, he enjoys "the very miscellaneousness of Rome, which made the mind flexible with constant comparison, and saved you from seeing the world's ages as a set of box-

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That Brooke and Casaubon have trouble communicating at all makes the dinner party at the Grange, where they try to communicate with one another, a good illustration of their respective shortcomings.

like partitions without vital connection"(p.244). The contrast between Will's response and Casaubon's is emphasized by the narrative which, paraphrasing Will's words, makes clear that such a view, despite Will's reassurance to the contrary, is exactly what Casaubon holds to. Casaubon's response to Rome lacks all vitality. He speaks of Rome to Dorothea in a "measured official tone" which does little for "the glories of the Eternal City"(p.229), and always distances himself from any suggestions he makes about things that she should see. Regarding Raphael, Casaubon observes that "'... most persons think it worth while to visit ...'"(p.229) his frescoes which, he believes, are highly esteemed.

As for Dorothea, Rome occasions and introduces several important features of her story. It is where she and Will begin their relationship. But more symbolically, it is where "domestic reality" meets her Theresa-like idealism. The figure of Theresa, which introduces the novel and Dorothea, anticipates both Dorothea and Lydgate. Earlier in the novel, Dorothea, in a fashion, mimics the events described in the preface. Theresa's early collision with her uncles anticipates a similar event in *Middlemarch*. Contemplating the possibility of marrying Casaubon, Dorothea is walking through the woods at the Grange when she, too, is met by domestic reality; not her uncle, but James Chettam and the ill-fated puppy, which Dorothea would fear to tread on. While Chettam literally interrupts her, Rome and the events in Rome present a far more profound challenge to her idealism, because there her meddlesome domestic reality and her idealism coincide, at least in part; Casaubon is the focus of both.

The treatment of language in the novel, as with the use of chance, is ambivalent. On the one hand, it is a vital constituent of the social environment which is the reality of the novel. On the other, language which acts as a kind of metonym for social behaviour, is represented as such a problem that it necessarily problematizes the social world of the novel. We have, then, the seeming paradox of the concrete representational horizon of the novel being undermined by the very narrative figures which constituted it in the first place. The social begins to undo itself.

(d) A huge whispering-gallery: the unreliability of the social world

The realism of *Middlemarch*, then, is ambivalent. It relies on language and on coincidence, and in doing so introduces readers to the social world which it seeks to represent. But these two constitutents of the realism of the novel also tend to undo its realistic efficacy. Chance, as we have seen, not only determines the social world, but also *over*determines it, making the social world, to a certain extent, objective, which renders it more easily represented. The narrator's concern to select and demarcate the representational horizon of the novel - "It would be well, certainly," the narrator says of the characters in the novel, "if we could help to reduce their number"(p.448) - has the effect of making the world of the text not only manageable, but also unrealistic, the reduction in numbers is too reliant on chance and coincidence. Language in the novel works in the other direction. If language is as volatile as it seems to be, what can we make of the narrator's own testimony?

This last question, I suggest, goes to the very heart of the question of realism in *Middlemarch*. The matter of the letter which falls into Raffles' hands has already been mentioned as an example of implausible coincidence in the novel. But it might, perhaps, be considered more symbolically. Introducing the scene in which Raffles takes up the fallen letter, the narrator asks a particularly poignant question: "Who shall tell what may be the effect of writing ?" (p.448). The reference is of course to Joshua Rigg Featherstone's letter to Bulstrode, a "bit of ink and paper which has long been an innocent wrapping"(p.448) but which accidentally comes to have dramatic consequences. But the novel, too, is a form of writing, and while Raffles' was the "one pair of eyes which have knowledge enough to turn (the letter) into the opening of a catastrophe" (p.448), the opening of *Middlemarch* to historically distant readers might have less determinate consequences.

However, the consequences are not indeterminate. As we have seen, the careful construction of a social reality, and the narrative evocation of that reality, makes the novel, at least in part, a work of realism. That is, it is, to a certain extent, determinate. But this determination is ambivalent, because it hovers between the over-determination of the novel, the necessary contraction of the world of the text to accomodate the plot, and indeterminacy, the malleability of its representational medium.

This, of course, is the kind of determinacy which I have discussed as a theoretical concept with regard to Lukács, Auerbach, and Bakhtin. Understood in this fashion, the realism of *Middlemarch*, then, can be seen as an illustration of the theoretical claims developed in the previous parts of this thesis, as both a redirection of literary theory towards the concepts outlined particularly in Chapter 7, and as a re-evaluation of the concept of realism within such literary theory. The social world, as we have seen, provides the determination of a reading of the novel, but that same social world is, we might say, unreliable. The use of language, and the discussion of language, within the social world threatens to undermine it because, elsewhere in the novel, the tension in language between determinacy and indeterminacy, is considered. The same can be said of the use of chance. Mrs Farebrother comments, at one one point, that "Fortune is a woman and capricious" (p.584), and indeed, Fortune, or chance, in the novel is, if not capricious, not entirely consistent. Sometimes it satisfies the realistic requirements of the novel - chance meetings will, after all, take place - and sometimes it serves other requirements - Bulstrode's unlikely comeuppance, for example, contributes to a critique of institutionalized morality. Other narrative figures work in similarly ambivalent fashions. Myth, for example, is both part of the substance of Middlemarch life - Farebrother is always making mythological references, and Casaubon, of course, is preoccupied with mythology. But it also serves as a kind of pattern which determines the story. Lydgate and Dorothea, the heroes of the novel, are placed against mythological backgrounds and even, occasionally, as is the case with Dorothea's meeting with Sir James and the unfortunate puppy, are represented as physically recreating mythology.

It is clear, then, that *Middlemarch* embodies several representational modes, including realism, but also melodrama and mythology, as well as romance and even, occasionally, farce (Featherstone's vigil-keepers, for example, and Featherstone himself, brandishing his cane and pulling his wig over his ears, are certainly comic figures). The theoretical interest of the novel, or at least its interest for the present study, is that these modes are served by precisely the same narrative devices. The social world, which contributes to the realism of the novel, slides almost imperceptibly into the romance of the novel. The three love problems, which are part of the processes of parallelism which increase the density of the social world, have very different solutions: Fred and Mary's, we might say, is idyllic-

pastoral; Will and Dorothea's romantic; and Rosamond and Lydgate's realistic.

The realism of the novel, then, must sit alongside other ways of determining the novel. The novel certainly is, as Bakhtin might have put it, a consummated vision of the social world. The fluidity of the narrator allows the social world to be represented from *outside*, but, at the same time, such a vision is necessarily synthetic. The synthetic qualities of the realism of the novel, which include, of course, its very fictionality, illustrate the synthetic structure of reality itself. Reliance on the social world is accompanied by the representation that each chronotope of the social world, each representational background, is like "a whispering-gallery" in which the idea of Truth, as such, is abandoned, and a new, social regime of determinacy is established. Realism, then, can be understood not as the dogmatic antithesis of critical theory, but as a concept within which the philosophical tension between indeterminacy and determinacy is realized. Its relationship to the idea of reality itself becomes both critical and representational, relying upon the real world as well as conferring its own problematic status upon it.

When the narrator returns to Dorothea in the finale of the novel, the original representation of an antithesis between Dorothea/Theresa and the social world has given way to a telling reconciliation between the two. The determining acts of Dorothea's life are, the narrator suggests, the "mixed result of an imperfect social state, in which great feelings will often take the aspect of error, and great faith the aspect of illusion"(p.896). But many of Dorothea's great feelings *are* erroneous, and her faith illusory. The realism of *Middlemarch* is a kind of insistence on the primary reality of the social state, which is, of course, imperfect. It is not a case, then, of choosing between realism and other modes of representation, either in *Middlemarch* or as a general theoretical position. It is rather that realism, like *Middlemarch*, or Cressida, is ineluctably ambivalent, it at once "is, and is not."

- 9 -

'We hold these truths': history, fiction, and realism in U.S.A.

Wonderful cities and free nations we shall fetch as we go.
- Walt Whitman

History and fiction are uneasily juxtaposed in John Dos Passos' *U.S.A.* and the relationship between these two discursive registers generates a hermeneutic tension which necessarily problematizes the idea of representation in the text. Different interpretations of this relationship result in very different ways of understanding the text. On the one hand, the historical and fictional discourses can be woven into a consistent representation. The historical figures and events referred to in the Newsreel and biographical sections can be correlated with events in the fictional narratives, and the different dimensions of the text tied together to generate a determinate representational pattern. On the other hand, if the disrupted experimental form of the text is given primacy, the text becomes a radical critique of the historical discourse which it incorporates, emphasizing and criticizing the extent to which the idea of history is or can be dominated by conventional forms of historiography.

The concept of realism for which this thesis has argued is predicated upon the possibility of simultaneously entertaining different interpretive possibilities. The tension between the two hermeneutic directions which can be taken in approaching *U.S.A.* is, as I shall try to show, a good illustration of the synthetic properties of this idea of realism. Rather than either taking the social and historical background of the text "as it is," or engaging in a radical critique of the ideas of society and history, thinking of *U.S.A.* in terms of the idea of realism for which I have argued both recognizes the cognitive volatility of the historical background and allows the text to establish a determinate representation of it, without overestimating the epistemological and semantic authority of such a representation.

(a) The function of history

In *U.S.A.*, as I have suggested, the tension inherent in this idea of realism derives from the different understandings of history which might be

adduced. One interpretive possibility is to consider history as a kind of referential framework for the text. As historical events and figures are incorporated into the text they perform a contextualizing function which hermeneutically frames the fictional narratives. If history takes this kind of place in an interpretive scheme, the individual fictional lives with which readers become familiar are lent a degree of historical verisimilitude, making *U.S.A.* seem, at least to a certain extent, realistic.

This interpretive tendency can be seen in the way in which historical events and figures act to condense the action of the fictional narratives. The First World War, for example, concentrates most of the fictional characters in and around Paris, and the personal narratives are played out against the background of the peace conference and Woodrow Wilson's visit to Paris and Rome. The Russian revolution and its implications also lurk meaningfully in the background. When Dick Savage returns to Paris after the war, this narrative concentration around historical references is clearly evident:

> The hub of this Paris was the Hôtel de Crillon on the Place de la Concorde, its artery the Rue Royale where arriving dignitaries, President Wilson, Lloyd George, and the King and Queen of the Belgians were constantly parading escorted by the Garde Républicaine in their plumed helmets; Dick began living in a delirium of trips to Brussels on the night express, lobster cardinal washed down with Beaune on the red plush settees at Larue's, champagne cocktails at the Ritz Bar, talk full of the lowdown over a demie at the Café Weber;[1]

In Paris, Dick meets J. Ward Moorehouse and his associate Ed Robbins, whom he eventually replaces as Moorehouse's right-hand man. Speaking of Paris, they have the following exchange:

> 'Still I'm glad to be back in little old Paree,' said Dick, smiling and stretching his legs out under the table.
> 'Only place in the world to be right at present,' said Robbins. 'Paris is the hub of the world ... unless it's Moscow.'(p.633)

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[1]John Dos Passos, *U.S.A.* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), p.631. All references are to this edition and will be included in the text. *U.S.A.* was first published as three separate novels - *The 42nd Parallel, 1919*, and *The Big Money* - in 1930, 1932, and 1936 respectively. The collected trilogy was first published in 1938.

Historical Paris is both the hub of the narrative at this stage and, as Robbins suggests, the conceptual centre of the world. It acts in *U.S.A.* as a kind of Bakhtinian chronotope, representing the organization of the real world, and binding the narrative sections of the text together. Later in the text, the historical and narrative focus shifts to New York. "'It's curious," Eveline Hutchins says, "'After the war New York. ... nobody can keep away from it'"(p.781).

If history is interpreted in this fashion then it acts primarily as the background to the fictional events. The participation of the fictional characters in a historical process allows readers vicariously to engage with the historical world. Interpretive focus is provided by the fictional characters and the text becomes a fictional conduit through which the social and historical background of the text becomes hermeneutically available to the reader.

If interpretation is approached through the fictional characters in this fashion, it is possible to relegate history to a kind of passive background to their individual lives. All the characters are fairly ordinary people, they emerge from their historical environment in the manner described by Lukács as the defining quality of the historical novel.[2] Woodrow Wilson may appear in Rome (see p.645), but only as part of the background of Dick's story. It is worth noting also the way in which the fictional characters function in the backgrounds of other characters' narratives. Joe Williams, for example, appears sporadically in Janey's narrative, and significantly in Dick's when they coincide in Genoa. In turn, Janey appears in other narratives as Miss Williams, Moorehouse's personal secretary. Moorehouse himself is perhaps the most salient example of this feature of the text. There are three sections in *The 42nd Parallel* devoted to him, after which, as he becomes increasingly successful as a propagandist and advertising magnate, he appears only in other characters' narratives. The

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[2]See, for example, Lukács' discussion of Scott in *The Historical Novel*, pp.33ff, and my discussion of Lukács in Chapter 4 above. One must be cautious, however, in suggesting parallels between Lukács' theory and Dos Passos' practice. Lukács had responded antagonistically to Brecht's endorsement of Dos Passos' avant-gardism (in *Manhattan Transfer*); see Lukács, *Essays on Realism*, p.176. Elsewhere he certainly seemed to consider Dos Passos on the modernist side of the realism/modernism debate; see Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, p.58. As we have seen, however, understanding and employing Lukács' critical insights often requires a degree of latitude, given the overtly partisan quality of much of his work.

nature of Moorehouse's work makes him increasingly a part of the historical process which the text represents, and as such, his personal experience of the historical process recedes into the background of the text. His life is represented through the perspectives of other characters. When, after a brief romantic liaison, Eveline Hutchins asks him why he is so distant, his response is telling: " ... he said quickly, 'I never write personal letters,' and changed the subject"(p.599).

But this is certainly not the only way of understanding the function of history in *U.S.A.* While it is possible to consider history as the background of the fiction, the unusual form of the text, its disruptedness and generic experimentation, unsettles such a relationship. Certain kinds of historiographical discourses are foregrounded in *U.S.A.* in such a way as to encourage a critique of the discourses through which the idea of history itself is established. By isolating fragments of historical discourse, and by presenting them in unusual forms - such as the poetic biographies of historical figures - the text, in a sense, defamiliarizes history, questioning the extent to which it provides a determinate representational framework for the fictional narratives. Rather than the fiction of the text relying on history to organize and concretize it, the fictional discourse and the textual structure of *U.S.A.* engage in a a critique of the idea of history. The Newsreel sections, for example, include fragments of journalistic discourse such as Moorehouse might have invented. Newsreel 35 includes this headline: LENIN SHOT BY TROTSKY IN DRUNKEN BRAWL (p.618), an echo of Moorehouse's confident, but erroneous, assertion that the Soviet Union will be short-lived: "'No, I have reliable information that Lenine (sic) and Trotsky have split and the monarchy will be restored in Russia inside of three months'"(p.587).

Rather than history contextualizing the fiction, *U.S.A.* begins to articulate what we might call the poetic structure of history.[3] This is emphasized by the way in which the text represents history as a kind of dehumanizing and irresistible force which dominates the lives of the fictional characters. Moorehouse who, as we have seen, slides from being a narrative focus to a background presence in other narratives, exemplifies the processes of interested disinformation in the historical environment.

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[3]Hayden White's introduction to *Metahistory*, a key text in contemporary critique of history and historical knowledge, is entitled "The Poetics of History."

There is also a persistent sense of inevitable degeneration throughout the text, to which many of the characters are sacrificed. Dick Savage is a good example of this aspect of the text. Originally a pacifist, scholar, and aspiring poet, Dick gradually abandons any authenticity or good faith in these pursuits for a combination of hedonism and commercial ambition. Shortly before he first returns to America from Europe, Dick is reprimanded for voicing anti-war sentiments. "'Don't monkey with the buzzsaw'"(p.508), he is told. But back in Paris for the Peace Conference, Captain Savage meets Ripley, one of his friends from the ambulance service, who tells him that another of their group, Steve Warner, has been jailed in Boston for refusing to register for the draft. When Dick first arrived in Paris as Captain Savage, he had wondered "what had happened to Steve" (p.631). When he meets Ripley, however, the other man's cynicism alarms Dick:

> This kind of talk made Dick feel uneasy: 'Méfiez-vous,' he quoted. 'Les oreilles ennemis vous écoutent.'
> 'And that's not the half of it.'
> 'Say, have you heard anything from Steve Warner?' Dick asked in a low voice.
> 'I got a letter from Boston ... I think he got a year's sentence for refusing to register ... He's lucky ... A lot of those poor devils got twenty years.'
> "'Well that's what comes of monkeying with the buzzsaw,' said Dick out loud.(p.652).

Dick's warning to Ripley is a quote of the wartime advice which, previously in the text, Eveline Hutchins reads on a sign on the wall, and his response to Steve's fate is a mocking echo of the reprimand once given to him. Similarly, Dick's poetic aspiration degenerates into a tendency to come up with vapid doggerel (p. 626) and parodies of French rhymes (p.635), and later manifests itself in his publicrelations (sic) talents.

Dick's poetry and pacifism are not the only ideological casualties in *U.S.A.* Dos Passos engages in a critique of many aspects of American culture and society. Particularly, *U.S.A.* dramatizes the corruption of the American left. G.H. Barrow appears intermittently throughout the text, and his vacuous endorsement of what he calls the "art of life" represents the betrayal of the American labour movement. Don Stevens, who similarly

moves in and out of the narrative, consolidates his position within the Communist Party, and is a thinly disguised symbol of Dos Passos' disillusionment with the political left.[4] Mac's commitment to the I.W.W. waxes and wanes, and Charley Anderson's repeated claim to be "just a mechanic" rings increasingly hollow as he becomes both richer and more dissolute. It is not only the political left that is targetted in *U.S.A.* The portrayal of Moorehouse, as I have already mentioned, and Eleanor Stoddard contributes to the relentless critique of other aspects of American society, while Joe Williams and Eveline Hutchins, among others, are represented as literal casualties of their historical circumstances.

In my discussion of Lukács I canvassed his development of the concept of reification, the way in which particular historical circumstances turn human subjects into almost inert objects. In *U.S.A.* Dick Savage almost ironically gives voice to the way in which the text illustrates what we might understand as the reification of history and its dehumanizing effect. After he convinces Anne Elizabeth Trent not to expect him to marry her - an episode about which, he muses, he might "write a poem and send it to her"(p.663) - she, pregnant with his child, becomes recklessly despairing. After an all-night drinking session with some French aviators, she convinces one of them to take her for a joyride at dawn. The plane crashes and she is killed. Dick tries to rationalize his indifference to Eleanor Stoddard: "' ... When history's walking on all our faces is no time for pretty sentiments'"(p.717). Dick's callousness and his feeling that the pressure of his historical circumstances preclude him from feeling remorseful are emotional illustrations of a reified social structure. Before Anne Elizabeth's death, one of Dick's reasons for not wanting to marry her was the burden that a wife and child would place upon him in his new career in publicrelations (sic).

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[4]Many studies of Dos Passos detail his political journey from left to right; a good overview is provided by Barry Maine in his introduction to Barry Maine ed., *Dos Passos: The Critical Heritage* (Routledge: London, 1988). *U.S.A.*, and particularly *The Big Money*, is an important landmark in this transition. Dos Passos' representation of Communism is discussed by, among others, the American Marxists Granville Hicks and Michael Gold, who place it in the context of Dos Passos' experience of the Spanish Civil War; see Gold, "The Keynote to Dos Passos' Works", and Hicks, "The Moods and Tenses of John Dos Passos", both in *Dos Passos: The Critical Heritage*, and, particularly, Hicks, "The Politics of John Dos Passos", in Andrew Hook ed., *Dos Passos: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1974), p.113.

In contrast to the first interpretive possibility which employs history as a context for the fictional action, this use of history invites a radical critique of that idea. The cycle of despair and alienation which is asseverated throughout the fictional narratives, the sacrifice of the individual to the social and historical, is represented as an inevitable consequence of the historical process. Jean-Paul Sartre notes the disruptive effect which results from this critical juxtaposition of history and fiction:

> Their significance (the characters in *1919*) is fixed. Close your eyes and try to remember your own life, try to remember it *that way*; you will stifle. It is this unrelieved stifling that Dos Passos wanted to express. In capitalist society, men do not have lives, they have only destinies. He never says this, but he makes it felt throughout. He expresses it discreetly, cautiously, until we feel like smashing our destinies.[5]

Sartre's observation is borne out by the shift in historical focus from Mac, the I.W.W., the Goldfield strike, and revolutionary Mexico; through Dick Savage, Harvard, and Paris; to Charley Anderson, New York, and Detroit. This development in the text evinces an interpretation of American history as the gradual emergence and triumph of the forces of industrial capital over democratic egalitarian principles. The pattern of the accompanying historical biographies reinforces this interpretation. In *The 42nd Parallel*, industry, development, and labour relations are posited as the crucial social and historical dynamics of the twentieth-century, and, accordingly, it includes biographies of labour leaders such as Eugene Debs and Bill Haywood; pioneer businessmen and industrialists, Minor Keith and Andrew Carnegie; scientists and inventors, Thomas Edison and Luther Burbank. In *1919* Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, and the Morgans exemplify the growing international significance of the United States, and particularly their intervention in the war. *The Big Money* details spectacular examples of the rapid development of particular sectors of American society; manufacturing, Henry Ford; popular cinema, Valentino; industry, Samuel Insull.[6]

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[5]Jean-Paul Sartre, "John Dos Passos and *1919*" (1938), in his *Literary Essays*, trans. Annette Michelson (Secaucus, NJ: Citadel Press), 1955, p.92.

[6]I should acknowledge that this pattern doesn't encompass all the historical biographies. In *The Big Money*, for example, alongside Ford and Insull there are biographies of dissenting voices such as Thorstein Veblen, or of tragic figures such as Isadora Duncan, and the alienated Frank Lloyd Wright, "not without honour, except in his own

History is not, then, the passive objective background of a novel, but represented as an active and destructive process which the commodifying forces of American capital come to dominate. This model of history is of reified social relations within which human lives become predetermined; lives, as Sartre suggests, become destinies. By dramatizing the confrontation between individuals and this idea of history, *U.S.A.* can be understood as a critique of received ideas of history, an effort to interrupt or at least protest against its inexorable movement. The textual dissonance which results from the fragmented quality of the text is an effort to move beyond the simple representation of history, and to challenge it, in Sartre's terms, to smash destiny.

These different functions of history in *U.S.A.* are seemingly antithetical, and critical responses have certainly tended to choose between them. They suggest what we might call a realist and a modernist interpretation of *U.S.A.* In terms of American literary history Dos Passos and *U.S.A.* do represent a kind of transitional point between these different aesthetic tendencies. But, as I have indicated, the idea of realism for which I have argued is an attempt to get beyond the dichotomy between realism and modernism, and the corresponding antithesis between realism and critical theory. In order to suggest how *U.S.A.* might synthesize the two different interpretations of history which I have set out above, it is instructive briefly to consider how other critics have characterized the relationship between fiction and history in the text.

(b) Between realism and modernism

Beginning with *Manhattan Transfer* and extending through the three novels which comprise the *U.S.A.* trilogy, Dos Passos developed and employed the experimental techniques for which he is perhaps most well-known. By breaking the trilogy into different narrative sections, and systematically including fragments of extraliterary discourse, Dos Passos obviously departed from traditional narrative models ("what would Henry James say ?", one critic rhetorically wondered[7]), because of which

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country"(p.1080). Generally, however, the emergence of figures such as Ford overshadows the increasingly disillusioned representations of these historical dissidents.

[7]Delmore Schwartz, "John Dos Passos and the Whole Truth" (1938), in *Dos Passos: The Critical Heritage* , p.183.

his work has often been discussed in terms of its generic experimentation, or placed in the context of literary modernism. The relationship between *U.S.A.* and film, for example, is one of the most pointed examples of Dos Passos' manipulation of generic conventions and techniques. The Newsreel and Camera Eye sections have been described as "properties ... borrowed from the motion picture" and the whole trilogy as "an experiment in *montage.*"[8] Parallels with experimental writers, and particularly Joyce, have also been frequent[9], and certainly justifiable, as *U.S.A.* often betrays Joyce's influence, stylistically and thematically. Buck Mulligan's ambition to Hellenise Ireland in *Ulysses*, for example, is echoed (or prefigured) by Dick Savage's *faux* aestheticism. Reflecting upon the American presence in Europe after the Great War, Dick suggests that he and his compatriots are "'... the Romans of the Twentieth Century'", while he "'...always wanted to be a Greek"(p.646).

These properties of the trilogy certainly set *U.S.A.* apart from simple ideas of the realistic novel, and this idea is well represented in Dos Passos scholarship. Charles Marz, for example, claims that the "usual criterion of realistic style, that it vanishes before the reality of the subject, does not apply to its pages."[10] Stanley Corkin, discussing *The 42nd Parallel*, similarly argues that its "modernist form explicitly ruptures the realist conventions of naturalism and disrupts its potentially quieting effect."[11]

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[8]Horace Gregory, "Dos Passos Completes His Modern Trilogy"(1936), in *Dos Passos: The Critical Heritage* , p.131. For a more general study of the influence of the cinema in Dos Passos' novels, see Claude-Edmonde Magny, *L'age du roman américain* (Paris: Seuil, 1948), p.68ff; Alan Spiegel, *Fiction and the Camera Eye: Visual Consciousness in Film and the Modern Novel* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Presss, 1976), p.177.

[9]Melvin Landsberg notes that Dos Passos had read *Ulysses* in 1922, and Joyce's name frequently appears in reviews and criticism of *Manhattan Transfer* and *U.S.A.*; see Melvin Landsberg, *Dos Passos' Path to* U.S.A.*: A Political Biography 1912-1936* (Boulder: Colarado Associated University Press, 1972), p.117. Among the critics and reviewers who have compared Dos Passos with Joyce are Sinclair Lewis and Michael Gold, who note similarities and view Dos Passos' work favourably; see Sinclair Lewis, "Manhattan at Last", and Michael Gold, "The Education of John Dos Passos", both in *Dos Passos: The Critical Heritage* at p.68 and p.115 respectively. Bernard de Voto goes so far as to posit Dos Passos' reading of Joyce as a watershed in his career: "Mr Dos Passos published his second and bad novel; he read Joyce, and in 1925 *Manhattan Transfer* appeared"; in *Dos Passos: The Critical Heritage*, p.123.

[10]Charles Marz, "*U.S.A.*: Chronicle and Performance", *Modern Fiction Studies*, 26, 3 (Autumn 1980), p.399.

[11]Stanley Corkin, "John Dos Passos and the American Left: Recovering the Dialectic of History", *Criticism*, 34, 4 (Fall 1992), p.5948. Corkin's article is a good example of what I have referred to as the modernist interpretation of *U.S.A.* His analysis, which places *The 42nd Parallel* into the theoretical and historical contexts of Hegelian Marxism and American history, relies upon an antithesis between critical theory and American

As often as the experimental, modernist qualities of *U.S.A.* are cited, however, its realism is also discussed. Delmore Schwartz, for example, claims that "[w]hatever else we may say of American life as represented in these narratives, there is one statement which we must make first; it is so, it is true".[12] Robert P. Weeks states clearly that *U.S.A.* can be considered a work of realism,[13] and Corkin, whom I have cited as maintaining that *The 42nd Parallel* disrupts realistic form, concedes nonetheless that it can be considered in terms of the "conventional realist devices of its fictional sections",[14] although he advocates a different approach.

My inclusion of *U.S.A.* in this study obviously gestures against critical tendencies to overstate the experimental in the novel at the expense of the realistic. Despite its various multiplicities and its unusual form, *U.S.A.* is certainly less abstract a novel than *Manhattan Transfer*, in which narrative Expressionism dominated the representation of New York. Indeed, Alfred Kazin is quite harsh in his criticism of *Manhattan Transfer* and its imperfect Expressionism, and goes on to say of *U.S.A.* that its achievement lies in its narrative sections which allow readers to "see each life perfectly at the moment it passes by".[15] Kazin argues against overstating the importance of the formal experimentation of the trilogy:

> Technically *U.S.A.* is one of the great achievements of the modern novel, yet what that achievement is can easily be confused with its elaborate formal structure.

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naturalism which resembles the arguments levelled against realism which this thesis contests. He uses terms such as "reify" and "naturalize" which evince his affinities with skeptical theories, and argues that *U.S.A.* is primarily a reaction against these political and aesthetic tendencies. In a footnote, Corkin refers to another of his articles in which he argued that the "realist form of American naturalism may, despite the explicit intentions of its practitioners, reify a positivist definition of self and the world"; p.609, n.10. American naturalism, represented, for example, by Theodore Dreiser and Sinclair Lewis, is, in my view, a kind of literary realism, committed to the same representational ambitions as what is generally known as realism, with important sub-generic particularities. Such a view is supported by Becker's suggestion that in the twentieth-century, literary realism was most pointedly evident in American fiction; see Becker, *Documents of Modern Literary Realism*, pp.18-20. By contrast, however, some views of literary history posit a fundamental distinction between realism and naturalism. Lukács, as I have discussed above, certainly held to such a view.

[12]Schwartz, "John Dos Passos and the Whole Truth", p.183.

[13]See Robert P. Weeks, "The Novel as Poem: Whitman's Legacy to Dos Passos", *Modern Fiction Studies*, 26, 3 (Autumn 1980), p.445.

[14]Corkin, "Dos Passos and the American Left", p.595.

[15]Alfred Kazin, "Dos Passos, Society and the Individual" (1942), in Andrew Hook ed., *Dos Passos: A Collection of Critical Essays* , .p.113.

> For the success of Dos Passos' method does not rest primarily on his schematization of the novel into four panels, four levels of American experience - the narrative proper, the "Camera Eye," the "Biographies," and the "Newsreel." That arrangement, while original enough, is the most obvious thing in the book and soon becomes the most mechanical. The book lives by its narrative style ...[16]

Edmund Wilson expresses a similar preference for *The 42nd Parallel* over *Manhattan Transfer*. Praising Dos Passos for his incorporation of "colloquial American" into the novel, and for conveying a sense of

> his people's lives: their friends and the members of their families, their amusements and their periods of stagnation, the places where they work and how much they get, the meals they eat, the beds they sleep in.[17]

Or, to recall Chekhov's Kostia, with whom we started this study, how they walk, talk, and so forth.

These conflicting critical perspectives attest to the equivocal function of history in the text. On the one hand, *U.S.A.* incorporates realistic narrative and its general ambition certainly seems to be the kind of social and historical representation which characterizes realism. On the other hand, the form of the novel strains at the consistency of realism, incorporating extra-literary influences[18], threatening to obscure the "reality" towards which it is intended. Certainly, the unusual experimental form of the trilogy disrupts the consistency of the narrative and, among other things, contributes to the interrogation of historical discourses with which the trilogy is concerned, criticizing what Adorno or Althusser might have called "ideology." This is the dimension of the text which motivates Corkin's juxtaposition of *The 42nd Parallel* with Hegelian Marxism, a

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[16]Kazin, "Dos Passos, Society and the Individual", pp.112-113.

[17]Edmund Wilson, "Dahlberg, Dos Passos, Wilder" (1930) in his *The Shores of Light: A Literary Chronicle of the Twenties and Thirties* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1952), p.448.

[18]It is worth noting that Bakhtin, in "Discourse in the Novel", characterizes the incorporation of extraliterary discourse as one of the principal means of introducing and realizing heteroglossia which is one of the defining features of the novel; see M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, pp.261-262. Dos Passos' multi-voiced trilogy, then, would seem to be an apposite example of what Bakhtin had in mind by heteroglossia.

manoeuvre which, in contrast to Kazin's assessment, relies upon the proposition that the novel's "most notable feature, its innovative form, acts as Adorno's ideal modernist text ... (it) ruptures the apparent solidity of realist conventions of representation". [19]

But the idea of realism for which I have argued involves a synthesis of representation and critique. In the case of *U.S.A.* this synthesis is only possible if equal interpretive weight is given to both the individuated, fictional narratives, and the collective juxtaposition of these fictional narratives with other representational discourses. As I shall try to show, such an approach countenances both the realistic and the critical dimensions of *U.S.A.*, simultaneously entertaining these previously opposed views of the text. The juxtaposition of fiction and history in the text creates the kind of realism for which this thesis has argued. Rather than proceeding from an antithesis between the two - and, by extension, between realism and theoretical critique - we can consider *U.S.A.* in terms of a creative synthesis of fiction and history, which is at once realistic and critical, allowing readers to avoid choosing between the realist and modernist interpretations of *U.S.A.* and between understanding history as either context or critical target.

(c) The speech of the people: narrative in U.S.A.

The individual narratives in *U.S.A.*, as I've already suggested, are the most accessible vehicles of realism in the text. But, as I shall try to show, these narratives evince a negotiation between different interpretive perspectives, and the dynamic interaction between these perspectives recreates the tension between the two understandings of history which I have been discussing. What I have provisionally called the realist interpretation privileges the individual focus of the narratives over the collective discourse of history, while the modernist interpretation sets history over against the individual lives. But within the narrative sections the individual and collective perspectives must be considered at the same time.

The narrative focus in the fictional sections is particularly unstable. Dos Passos uses a mixed focus which both assimilates and represents the

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[19]Corkin, "Dos Passos and the American Left", p.595.

consciousness of the particular character in question. In the narrative of Mac, the first fictional character, this narrative technique is readily apparent:

> When the wind set from the silver factories across the river the air of the gray fourfamily frame house where Fainy McCreary was born was choking all day with the smell of whaleoil soap. Other days it smelt of cabbage and babies and Mrs McCreary's washboilers. Fainy could never play at home because Pop, a lame cavechested man with a wispy blondgray mustache, was nightwatchman at the Chadwick Mills and slept all day. It was only around five o'clock that a curling whiff of tobaccosmoke would seep through from the front room into the kitchen. That was a sign that Pop was up and in good spirits, and would soon be wanting his supper.
> Then Fainy would be sent running out to one of two corners of the short muddy street of identical frame houses where they lived.
> To the right it was half a block to Finley's where he would have to wait at the bar in a forest of mudsplattered trouserlegs until all the rank brawling mouths of grownups had been stopped with beers and whiskies. Then he would walk home, making each step very carefully, with the handle of the pail of suds cutting into his hand.(p.22)

The narrative images in this passage derive from a variety of perspectives. The passage begins by placing Fainy within his domestic environment, but then begins to assimilate his view of that environment, referring to people with the names by which he knows them. Similarly, his environment is mapped out by the distances and directions with which he is familiar, and the names of the landmarks which he recognizes. The image of "a forest of mudsplattered trouserlegs" is particular evocative of this mixed narrative perspective. It literally evokes Fainy's perspective, what he sees before him. But at the same time the figurative language goes beyond Fainy's perspective, and the narrative focus subtly shifts to represent the environment from a different perspective, a critical overview which provides a different view of the bar.

When Fainy's mother dies, the narrative synthesis of a position within Fainy's consciousness and a transgredient position can clearly be seen:

> The strike was not popular on Orchard Street. It meant that Mom had to work harder and harder, doing bigger and bigger boilerfuls of wash, and that Fainy and his older sister Milly had to help when they came home from school. And then one day Mom got sick and had to go back to bed instead of starting in on the ironing, and lay with her round white creased face whiter than the pillow and her watercreased hands in a knot under her chin. The doctor came and the district nurse, and the whole flat smelt of doctors and nurses and drugs, and the only place Fainy and Milly could find to sit was on the stairs. There they sat and quietly cried together.(p.24)

Between two neutral representations, the strike and Fainy and Milly sitting on the stairs, is the narrative recreation of Fainy's making sense of these events. The strike, the unpopularity of which has already been established by the conversation which precedes this passage, is then represented in terms which are intelligible to Fainy, the burden placed upon him, his sister, and, most importantly, his mother. Pop's unemployment translates into "bigger and bigger boilerfuls of wash", the child-like syntax representing Fainy's understanding of the strike. Fainy, through his snowball fights with "Bohunks and Polaks", does have some understanding of ethnic tension, but the social implications of the strike - it has been initiated, apparently, by "'... damn lousy furreners ...'"(p.24) - are only rendered intelligible for Fainy by the visibly enlarging loads of laundry. The narrative assimilates Fainy's comprehension of the strike, and of his mother's death, and then moves away from him to represent him from the outside, as a small scared boy, crying with his sister on the staircase.

This mixed narrative focus leads towards an interpretive ambiguity. The characters of each narrative are both represented and representing. Discussing character in *1919*, Sartre suggests that the fictional characters are peculiarly synthetic representations:

> Dos Passos' man is a hybrid creature, an interior-exterior being. We go on living with him and within him, with his vacillating, individual consciousness, when suddenly it wavers, weakens, and is diluted in the collective consciousness. We follow it up to that

> point and suddenly, before we notice, we are on the outside.[20]

Reading the novel, Sartre suggests, is a constant negotiation of these narrative shifts. He begins by evoking the metaphor of the novel as a mirror, and goes on, throughout his essay, to illustrate how *U.S.A.*, or at least *1919*, involves a constant transition back and forth from one side of the mirror to the other.

Sartre's observations are extremely instructive, particularly insofar as he is exclusively concerned with the fictional narratives in the text. The hermeneutic experience of the individual fictional lives is highly synthetic, a hybrid of engagement and detachment, of immediate experience and retrospective assessment. This hybridity, I suggest, parallels the hybrid structure of the text as a whole, the way in which it juxtaposes the individual fictional lives with the collective discourse of history. This hybridity both contextualizes the fictional discourse, generating narrative realism, and limits the fictional discourse, encouraging a critique of the historical process. This can be seen more clearly if we consider more closely the representational effects of the hybrid fictional narratives.

In Mac's narrative, which is the most discrete and one of the longest stories in the text, the peculiarly mixed narrative focus of *U.S.A.* is quickly established. When Mac's story starts to coincide with historical events, the tensile realism of *U.S.A.* is readily observed. In Goldfield, Nevada, Mac joins an I.W.W. strike. Before he leaves for Nevada, Mac had become involved with Maisie, his future wife, who had tried to dissuade him from going. When he first arrives, the narrative focus is situated outside him, and much of his direct speech and that of other characters is incorporated into the narrative:

> At the end of the alley was a small house like a shoebox with brightly lit windows. Young fellows in miners' clothes or overalls filled up the end of the alley and sat three deep on the rickety steps.
> 'What's this, a poolroom?' asked Mac.
> 'This is the *Nevada Workman* ... Say, my name's Ben Evans; I'll introjuce (sic) you to the gang ... Say, yous

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[20]Sartre, "John Dos Passos and *1919*", p.96.

> guys, this is fellowworker McCreary ... he's come on from Frisco to set up type.'
> 'Put it there, Mac,' said a sixfooter who looked like a Swede lumberman, and gave Mac's hand a wrench that made the bones crack.(p.94-95)

Mac soon receives a letter from Maisie, telling him she is pregnant, and expecting him to return. The letter coincides with Big Bill Haywood's arrival in Goldfield. As Mac listens to Haywood, whose biography appears just before this narrative episode, his mixed sentiments intrude into the narrative, which includes both Mac's impressions of Haywood's speech, and his concern about Maisie:

> Big Bill talked about solidarity and sticking together in the face of the masterclass and Mac kept wondering what Big Bill would do if he'd got a girl in trouble like that.(p.96)

The narrative then both engages the reader directly in Mac's experience, as well as representing the conflict between Mac's domestic and political sensibilities. Maisie's lack of a political conscience is one of her shortcomings, but the resolute misogyny of the workers' movement is equally contemptible. Fred Hoff, one of the organizers, is rigorously puritanical, while the logic of Ben Evans' casual belittlement of Mac's concern is clearly flawed: "'For crissake, Mac, if a girl wasn't a goddamn whore she wouldn't let you, would she?"(p.99).

These shifts of narrative focus establish Mac as both the representing subjectivity of the narrative and a represented figure, subjected to social forces outside himself. Elsewhere, similar narrative shifts can be traced. When Mac first arrives in San Francisco, for example, the narrative is disjointed and impressionistic:

> The streets were full of lights. Young men and pretty girls in brightcolored dresses were walking fast through a big yanking wind that fluttered dresses and scarves, slapped color into cheeks, blew grit and papers in the air.(p.84)

Mac's disorientation generates a concomitant disengagement in the narrative, which records simply a series of vague images. But Mac gets a

job and gradually settles into his environment, and the narrative shifts to accomodate his changed situation:

> All that winter Mac worked at Bondello's, ate spaghetti and drank red wine and talked revolution with him and his friends in the evening, went to Socialist picnics or libertarian meetings on Sundays. Saturday nights he went round to whorehouses with a fellow named Miller, whom he'd met at the Y. Miller was studying to be a dentist. He got to be friends with a girl named Maisie Spencer who worked in the millinery department at the Emporium. Sundays she used to try to get him to go to church.(p.85)

The images of Mac's life have now been integrated into familiar repeated patterns of experience, and a long period of time has been collapsed into one representational moment. Rather than the isolated subjectivity which dominated the narrative when he first arrived in San Francisco, Mac is now an object in a social environment, associated with two themes which will persistently clash in his life, his politics and his sexuality.

This narrative style is recreated in all the fictional narratives. Sailing on a British ship, Joe is taken into custody in Liverpool, and an American consular official eventually comes to his aid. Much of this episode is represented in fairly conventional realistic narrative:

> The busylooking young man got to his feet and went up to Joe. 'Well, you've certainly been making me a lot of trouble, but I've been over the records in your case and it looks as if you were what you represented yourself to be ... What's your father's name?'
> 'Same as mine, Joseph P. Williams. ... Say, are you the American consul?'
> 'I'm from the consulate. ... Say, what the hell do you want to come ashore without a passport for? Don't you think we have anything better to do than to take care of a lot of damn fools that don't know enough to come in when it rains? Damn it, I was goin' to play golf this afternoon and here I've been here two hours waiting to get you out of the cooler.'
> 'Jeez, I didn't come ashore. They come on and got me.'
> 'That'll teach you a lesson, I hope. ... Next time you have your papers in order.'
> 'Yessirree ... I shu will.'(pp.375-376)

In this passage, Joe is a represented object, and the narrative includes his direct discourse. Once he is released, he wanders around the streets until he meets a group of American sailors. Once again the narrative shifts between using Joe's "voice" as a representational focus and representing Joe himself:

> Then just when the streetlights were going on, and Joe was feeling pretty discouraged, he found himself walking down a side street behind three Americans. He caught up to them and asked them if they knew where the *Tampa* was. Why the hell shouldn't they know, weren't they off'n her and out to see the goddam town and he better come along. And if he wasn't tickled to meet some guys from home after those two months on the limejuicer and being in jail and everything.(p.377)

Joe's manner of speaking is now incorporated into the tone of the narrative - "And if he wasn't tickled" - and the narrative also registers the idiom in which his new friends speak. Once Joe returns to America, the narrative once again changes in focus and tone:

> The *Tampa* had gone into drydock at Newport News for repairs on a started plate. Joe and Will Stirp hung around Norfolk all day without konowing what to do with themselves. Saturday afternoons and Sundays, Joe played a little baseball with a scratch team of boys who worked in the Navy Yard, evenings he went out with Della Matthews. (p.380)

The temporal structure of the narrative is markedly different, reverting to an iterative technique which evokes a sense of regularity and familiarity. The distant overview of Joe not only places him in his historical environment but also emphasizes the extent to which he is subordinated to his environment.

In Dick Savage's narrative, a similar dynamic is evident. As ambulance volunteers, he and his friends adapt very quickly to their European environment:

> Except for an occasional shell from the Bertha, Paris was quiet and pleasant that November. It was too foggy for airraids. Dick and Steve Warner got a very cheap room back of the Panthéon; in the daytime they

> read French and in the evenings roamed round cafés and drinking places. Fred Summers got himself a job and a steady girl the second they hit Paris. Ripley and Ed Schuyler took lodgings in considerable style over Henry's bar.(p.494)

The representation of Dick and his friends in Paris is essentially an overview of them, but elsewhere, the structure and tone of Dick's narrative is quite different. After his rejection of Anne Elizabeth, for example, Dick's thoughts begin to impose themselves upon the narrative as he drifts into sleep:

> Tomorrow. Seventhirty: shave, buckle puttees ... café au lait, brioches, beurre. He'd be hungry, hadn't had any supper ... deux oeufs sur le plat. Bonjour m'ssieurs mesdames. Jingling spurs to the office. Sergeant Ames at ease. Day dragged out in khaki; twilight tea at Eleanor's, make her talk to Moorehouse to clinch job after the signing of the peace, tell her about the late General Ellsworth, they'll laugh about it together. Dragged out in khaki days until the signing of the peace. Dun, drab, khaki. Poor Dick got to go to work after the signing of the peace. Poor Tom's cold. Poor Dicky boy ... Richard ... He brought his feet up to where he could rub them. Poor Richard's feet. After the Signing of the Peace.
> By the time his feet were warm, he'd fallen asleep.(p.663)

In Dick's narrative, then, we are presented with different perspectives on the historical events which have taken him there. From the external representations of particular episodes, to the retrospective summary of his lifestyle, to this highly personalized stream of consciousness. The overall representation of Paris is an amalgamation of all these different perspectives, each with a different emphasis.

Eveline Hutchins and Eleanor Stoddard also find themselves in Paris, which, through all these different representations, takes on a concrete tangibility which allows it to serve as the location for the events of the narrative. Eveline's narrative evokes Paris in a similar textual manner to Dick's:

> Eveline went to live with Eleanor in a fine apartment Eleanor had gotten hold of somehow on the Quai de

> la Tournelle. It was the mansard floor of a gray peelingfaced house built at the time of Richelieu and done over under Louis Quinze. Eveline never tired of looking out the window, through the delicate tracing of the wroughtiron balcony, at the Seine where toy steamboats bucked the current, towing shinyvarnished barges that had lace curtains and geraniums in the windows of their deckhouses painted green and red, and at the island opposite where the rocketing curves of the flying buttresses shoved the apse of Notre Dame dizzily upwards out of the trees of a little park. They had tea at a small Buhl table in the window almost every evening when they got home from the office on the Rue de Rivoli, after spending the day pasting pictures of ruined French farms and orphaned children and starving warbabies into scrapbooks to be sent home for use in Red Cross drives.(pp.514-15)

In these representations of Paris, indeed in all of the representations of historical locations, the same narrative interrelation between different narrative focuses is evident. Each character's experience of their environment is juxtaposed with a kind of overview of the environment, with attention to landmarks, to incidental details such as the weather or the traffic on the river, and this mixture of the public and the individual allows the narrative to achieve a tense balance between representation and critique. Different accounts of the same event or location, such as the meeting between Joe and Dick Savage in Genoa, have a similarly mixed effect. On the one hand, the different representations of the same event compromise one another. But on the other, the accumulated experiences of Paris, or, later in the text, of New York, complement one another, creating a kind of narrative density within the overall design of the text, at the expense of its constituent stories. Dick and Steve Warner, although they are wandering rather aimlessly about, know their way around rather better than Joe does. Since their arrival in Italy, Dick's poor French has been replaced by his even poorer Italian but it has still helped him adapt to his environment. When he and Steve meet Joe, the encounter is represented from a balanced, middle-distance perspective:

> While they were looking at a marble lion, shaped like a dog, that stood polished to smoothness by centuries of hands at the bottom of a flight of steps, an American voice hailed them, wanting to know if they knew their way around this goddam town. It was a

> young fellow who was a sailor on an American boat that had come over with a carload of mules.
>
> ...
>
> 'You guys seem to be a couple of pretty good guys,' the sailor said. They handed him the bottle and he took a gulp. 'You fellers are princes,' he added, spluttering, 'and I'm going to tell you what I think, see. ... This whole goddam war's a gold brick, it ain't on the level, it's crooked from A to Z. No matter how it comes out fellers like us gets the s---y end of the stick, see? Well, what I say is all bets is off ... every man go to hell in his own way ... and three strikes is out, see?' They finished up the cognac.(p.499)

The meeting is placed carefully into context, and Joe's rough speech and his limited understanding of his environment become part of the represented context. But when the same meeting is delivered from Joe's perspective, the realistic context is not supplied with as much detail:

> On some steep steps he ran into a couple of Americans in khaki uniforms and asked them the way and they gave him a drink out of a bottle of cognac and said they were on their way to the Eyetalian front and that there'd been a big retreat and that everything was cockeyed and they didn't know where the cockeyed front was and they were going to wait right there till the cockeyed front came right to them.(p.530-31)

The syntax of this overlong sentence betrays the lack of conceptual organization with which Joe registers this meeting, and is a pointed contrast to the same scene in Dick's narrative. Dick's greater capacity generally to balance his individual life with his environment supplies his representation of this scene with greater determinate detail, whereas Joe's lack of control sees his narrative become increasingly interior and indistinct. The rapid transitions in his story from New York to Bordeaux and then to Genoa, and shortly thereafter to St Nazaire are barely canvassed in the narrative. In St Nazaire, the narrative and Joe become increasingly disordered, and his story ends abruptly when he is killed in a fight.

This analysis of the narrative sections of *U.S.A.* reveals several important features of the representational structure of the whole text. Each

individual narrative, as I have tried to show, is marked by important shifts of focus which offers the reader a range of experiences of the historical environment in which the narative is placed. The narrative shifts from retrospective summaries of periods of the characters' lives, to a more immediate overview of particular episodes, to a close interior focus. These different perspectives juxtapose different aspects of the same social and historical environment, which both complement each other and collide with each other. They can be aggregated, offering the reader a more complete representation, or counterposed, undermining the representational efficacy of the text.

This narrative method is repeated in each fictional narrative. While the focus changes, the shifting narrative process is consistent from character to character. Once again, this has an ambivalent effect. The repetition of the pattern both reinforces and undermines each individual narrative section. There is also a general shift from the individual narratives to a sense of the collective representation which is constituted by all of them together. These different accounts of life in this particular milieu, both resemble each other, and yet differ importantly. Not only is each section a kind of hybrid of an individual and collective focus, but the text as a whole becomes accessible at an individual and a collective level.

Individual and collective perspectives also have their own distinct voices in the text. The Camera Eye sections, and the Newsreel and biographical sections also figure in any interpretation of the text, and it is necessary to consider these dimensions of the text in greater detail.

(d) The one and the many

The extraliterary sections of *U.S.A.* as I have indicated above, can be understood in different ways. One possibility is to correlate this discourse with the events of the fictional narratives, and there is also a potential interpretive conflict between the Newsreel and Camera Eye sections. As Charles Marz points out, within *U.S.A.* the Newsreel and Camera Eye sections "chronicle the voices of the public sphere", and he goes on to suggest that the Camera Eye and the Newsreel collide in the text to create a conflict between the public and private voices.[21]

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[21]Marz, "Chronicle and Performance", p.403.

Certainly this conflict is evident if we think about the way in which sections of Newsreel often seem to be the kinds of things which Dick and Moorehouse, as publicrelations counsel, might have written. Dick and Moorehouse act as symbols of the disingenuous interests which are beginning to dominate and, in Dos Passos' view, impoverish and damage American society. Working alongside Dick and Moorhouse in this process are the twin enterprises of industrialization, represented by Charley Anderson, and popular culture, represented by Margo Dowling. As I have already discussed, *U.S.A.* dramatizes a process of historical degeneration, which Marz characterizes as the conflict between the public and private voices. He argues that the private voice in *U.S.A.*, which is most directly represented by The Camera Eye sections, is gradually silenced[22] a claim reinforced by the steady decline in the number of Camera Eye sections from *The 42nd Parallel* to *The Big Money*.[23]

This conflict between the public and private is what encourages Corkin to place Dos Passos in the philosophical tradition of anti-Stalinism and Western Hegelian-Marxism, and, as we have seen, to privilege the "modernism" of *The 42nd Parallel* over its "realism." Corkin suggests that the objectivity of history is questioned through the kind of critique developed by the early Lukács and the theorists of the Frankfurt School[24]. Although Corkin limits his discussion to *The 42nd Parallel*, Adorno and Horkheimer's critique of the "culture industry" could certainly be ranged alongside Dos Passos' treatment of Hollywood in *The Big Money*. The public mind, then, is the reified ideological structure, and the interests behind it, a radical critique of which is posited as an urgent philosophical imperative. Marz' analysis reaches similar conclusions, focusing upon the images of alienation, and characterizing the fragments of historical discourse as "world and word debris, ... the slowly and inevitably triumphant noise of history."[25]

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[22]Marz, "Chronicle and Performance"p.400.

[23]For what it is worth, the number of fictional narrative sections in each part of the trilogy varies negligibly, as do the number of biographies, while the Newsreels increase slightly (19 in *The 42nd Parallel*, 24 in *1919*, and 25 in *The Big Money*). Only the number of Camera Eye sections changes significantly (27 in *The 42nd Parallel*, 15 in *1919*, 9 in *The Big Money*).

[24]Corkin, "Dos Passos and the American Left", p.592.

[25]Marz, "Chronicle and Performance", p.407.

But these "disruptive" interpretations of the historical discourse in *U.S.A.* are not necessarily the last word on the dramatized conflict between the one and the many. Within the narrative sections, as I have tried to show, there is a similarly tensile synthesis of seemingly exclusive perspectives. It is possible, I suggest, to create a similar kind of synthesis within the text as a whole. This is particularly evident if we consider the reciprocal effects of the different sections, rather than conceiving of the extraliterary sections as a kind of disruption. As I have said, in *U.S.A.* the representation of social and historical reality works through correlating fictional and historical locations and events. In this regard, the Newsreel and biographical sections act in tandem with this process. During Mac's narrative, for example, the Newsreel intervenes with fragments of newsprint which allude to contemporary historical events:

CLAIMS ISLANDS FOR ALL TIME (p.20)

GENERAL STRIKE NOW THREATENS (p.61)

TEDDY WIELDS BIG STICK (p.80)

As well as the headlines, of course, there are sections of songs which allude to a general cultural environment, and fragments of news copy which juxtapose different historical events:

Let me throw my arms around you
Honey ain't I glad I found you

...

Madero's troops defeat rebels in battle at Parral Roosevelt carries Illinois oratory closes eyelids Chicago pleads for more water (p.119)

The Newsreel then presents not only a disembodied public voice, or as Marz puts it, the noise of history. It can also be incorporated into the representational structure of the text, or rendered partially harmonious. The American entry into the war, for example, occasions Moorehouse's enlistment, and the general movement towards Europe by many of the characters. Shortly after the declaration of war appears in Eleanor Stoddard's narrative, the Newsreel offers several accounts of it. Headlines announcing U.S. AT WAR (p.301) and ARMIES CLASH AT VERDUN IN GLOBE'S GREATEST BATTLE (p.345) are juxtaposed with war songs

which announce that *The Yanks are coming* (p.301) and tell of *the infantree the infantree/ With the dirt behind their ears*. Simultaneously, however, resistance to the War, which is a significant theme in the narrative, is also registered. When Charley Anderson is in New York, just prior to his departure for Europe, he finds himself in a bar with Ben Compton and Al Johnson, a radical reporter. Discussing the declaration of war, Al Johnson predicts that "'[t]hey'll use it (the war) to clear up opposition at home""(p.339). His comment echoes the headlines in the previous Newsreel which include, along with the declaration of war, this warning: ABUSING FLAG TO BE PUNISHED (p.301).

The Newsreels begin to resonate on different levels. On the one hand, they interrupt the text, compromising its representational efficacy. On the other, it is also possible interpretively to weave them into the general representational pattern of the text. The idea of realism for which I have argued allows these seemingly contradictory interpretive possibilities simultaneously to be entertained. The theoretical foundations of this idea of realism are marked by a similar internal tension, a conflict between the need for determinate meaning and the recognition of the problematic nature of meaning. In *U.S.A.* the representation of historical reality is marked by this kind of tension, and the different possibilities of the Newsreel sections are one manifestation of it.

The same can be said of the biographies. As I have said, some of the biographical figures are insinuated into the narrative, serving as historical referents. At the same time, however, they are taken out of the narrative, and their representational and referential significance interrogated. But an analysis of the biographical sections also reveals a textual dynamic between an individual and a collective perspective.

Individually, the biographies suggest that historical personalities, as part of a historical landscape, are put together through patterns of experience. They emerge from their social environment, rather than being explained in terms of their individuality:

> Debs was a railroadman, born in a weatherboard shack
> at Terre Haute.
> He was one of ten children.
> ...

At fifteen Gene Debs was already working as a
machinist on the Indianapolis and Terre Haute
Railway.
He worked as a locomotive fireman,
clerked in a store (p.37)

The biography of Debs establishes an image of the historical personality through aggregating his experiences. These experiences then become the words which he speaks, and his capacity for speech establishes him as a quintessentially public figure, a presidential candidate in 1908. Many of the biographies establish similar patterns in their representation of historical figures. Andrew Carnegie, for example,

always saved his pay
whenever he had a dollar he invested it
...
he had confidence in railroads,
he had confidence in communications,
he had confidence in transportation,
he believed in iron.
Andrew Carnegie believed in iron, built bridges
Bessemer plants blast furnaces rolling mills;
Andrew Carnegie believed in oil;
Andrew Carnegie believed in steel;
always saved his money
whenever he had a million dollars he invested it
Andrew Carnegie became the richest man in the
world
and died (pp.224-225)

These biographies are presented, in a sense, poetically. If we take the historical figure as a kind of representational horizon, as a reality, the biographies make explicit the poetic structure of such realities. The lives of the historical figures are patterns of experience, repeated movements of a particular kind. Carnegie's thrift establishes his historical reality. An analogous pattern can be traced in the biography of Thomas Edison, whose compulsion to "try things out" lies behind his historical importance.

The biographies, then, establish a nexus between the historical individuals and their historical significance. As individuals, their lives are made up of patterns of experience, and then these patterns become their historical importance. By capturing these patterns in the prose-poetry of the biographies, *U.S.A.* once again presents them as historical phenomena,

and illustrates the construction of these phenomena. They are, at once, affirmed as historically real, and yet characterized as quasi-poetic structures, as constructions. The possibility of correlating the historical figures with the fictional characters - Margo Dowling and Isadora Duncan, for example - has, once again, an ambivalent effect. The historical environment which enhances the realism of the fiction is enhanced by the correlation, but the historical characters are also subjected to a kind of fictionalizing. The blurring of the distinctions between fiction and history, and between literary and extraliterary discourse, creates a kind of dialogue which relativizes both sides of this equation.

Alongside the correlation of the narrative sections with the free-floating historical discourse in the text, there is also the isolated subjectivity of the Camera Eye. Once again, however, the discord between the Camera Eye and the narrative sections, on the one hand, and the Newsreel and biographies, on the other, is not absolute. The progression of the Camera Eye sections suggests a kind of maturing process, an individual development which gradually expands its representational focus. The early Camera Eye sections are highly subjective, and it is difficult to see beyond them to determine what kind of social environment the "camera" is focused upon. The first section, for example, lacks any external perspective which can place the narrative impressions into a general social context:

> under the counter it's dark and the lady the nice Dutch lady who loves Americans and has relations in Trenton shows you postcards that shine in the dark pretty hotels and palaces O que c'est beau schön prittie prittie and the moonlight ripple ripple under the bridge (p.22)

At this stage, the subjectivity of the Camera Eye doesn't assimilate any general sense of the context of these experiences, registering only a few isolated place names and a vague impression of an angry anti-British mob. Snatches of different languages - French, German, and Dutch or Afrikaans - are represented, but generally, the environment in which this experience is taking place is left unrepresented, the individual experience displaces the possibility of a more general impression.

As the trilogy progresses, however, the interrelation which we saw in the narrative sections between individual and public experience is resumed, and the Camera Eye begins to achieve a greater degree of narrative lucidity. The Camera Eye (16), for example, while still bound to an individual subjectivity is beginning to include matters which relate to the general context of the individual's experience:

> it was hot as a bakeoven going through the canal from Delaware City and turtles sunning themselves tumbled off into the thick ocher ripple we made in passing and He was very gay and She was feeling well for once and He made us punch of tea and mint and a little Saint Croix rum but it was hot as the hinges of Delaware and we saw scarlet tanagers and redwing blackbirds and kingfishers cackled wrathfully as the yellow wave from the white bow rustled the reeds and the cattails and the sweetflag and He talked about law reform and what politicians were like and where were the Good Men in this country and said Why thinking the way I think I couldn't get elected to be notary public in any county in the state not with all the money in the world no not even dogcatcher (p.153)

The last Camera Eye sections, of course, break from this progression, and represent rather a protest against the social environment in which they are set. While, as I have said, there is a kind of conflict between the individual voice and the public mind, the individual voice is not, as has been suggested, entirely silenced at the end of *U.S.A.*, but instead engages in a relentless critique of the social world, a critique most pointedly reflected in the Camera Eye (50) which, in response to the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti, grimly echoes Engels' (and Benjamin Disraeli's) apprehension of Victorian England:

> all right we are two nations (p.1105)

The isolation of the individual voice, however, is vitiated by its relationship with the rest of the text. The Newsreel and the Camera Eye form a kind of dialectical representation of the social and historical environment. Alongside the Camera Eye and its grim concession of defeat which represents a personal response to the Sacco-Vanzetti affair, there is the way in which the same affair affects the life of a group of individuals within the narrative. In Mary French's story, the Sacco-Vanzetti affair is an

ingress into some of *The Big Money*'s most poignant moments. Jerry Burnham, who has appeared sporadically throughout the trilogy as a kind of resident cynic, is at his most dissolute and caustic when he and Mary meet in Boston during the protests; Mary, on the other hand, both commits herself to the cause and uses Boston as an environment to recover from her disappointment in her relationship with Ben Compton; Don Stevens reappears, consolidating his personal power within the movement; the "laborfaker" G.H. Barrow, who is also another former lover of Mary's, is most pointedly found out when he refuses to participate in the demonstrations. As well as the narrative use of the Sacco-Vanzetti affair, there are also the Newsreel allusions to the case, and the startling headline: SACCO AND VANZETTI MUST DIE (p.1104) which takes its place alongside the narrative and Camera Eye representations of the matter.

As well as the development within the Camera Eye, then, the individual perspective also becomes part of a representational dialogue within the text. The individual voice both affects and is affected by the rest of the text, criticizing, for example, the Sacco-Vanzetti headline, but also making possible the more complex social relationships occupying the narrative sections which focus upon the affair. This dialogue suggests that the apprehension of the historical world is a complicated matter, involving a negotiation between an isolated individual perspective and an overdetermined public mind. As each representational mode takes its place in this dialogue, the possibility of giving one or another priority becomes increasingly remote. Rather, *U.S.A.* suggests that history, and the historical reality of the U.S.A., cannot be considered an objective reality, but rather the reality of a combination of experience and voices.

(e) Realism and ambiguity in U.S.A.

Towards the end of *The Big Money*, Dick Savage, at this stage a rapidly rising executive working for J.W. Moorehouse, is embroiled in a heated conversation with one of his juniors. In an angry response to Reggie Talbot's drunken and belligerent cynicism, Dick makes this comment:

> 'Whether you like it or not, the molding of the public mind is one of the most important things that goes on in this country ...'(p.1145)

Shortly thereafter, the situation somewhat smoothed over, Dick says, "'[w]e've got to be realists'"(p.1145). In the cold light of the day which follows this long night, Dick's "realism" enables him to shrug off the previous night's misadventures and struggle into the office where, since Moorehouse's indisposition, he is assuming control, in which capacity he considers firing Reggie Talbot, who hasn't managed to make it in.

For Dick, "realism" seems to mean something like getting one's priorities right. Reggie's denigration of Moorehouse and his failure, in Dick's view, properly to appreciate their work in "publicrelations" are serious improprieties, which, it seems, he will shortly have cause to regret. But there is something odd about Dick's sense of realism, something ambivalent about his assiduous commitment to his work in public relations. When Dick responds to Reggie's callous enquiry about Moorehouse's health with a palliative version of events, even as he does, the artifice of what he is saying is not lost on him:

> 'Say, Dick,' said Reggie, 'is there anything in the rumour that old doughface toppled over ?'
> 'Mr Moorehouse had a little attack of acute indigestion ... he was better when I left,' said Dick in a voice that sounded a little too solemn in his ears.(p.1144)

This distance between what Dick says publicly and his own sense of what he says is something which recurs throughout his story. When he and Ed Griscolm, his professional rival, are competing for the right to bid for an important account, Dick, in response to Griscolm's proposal "heard his own voice saying it was wonderful, but it needed a slightly different slant"(p.1120), and during his argument with Talbot, he "wanted to shut up, but he couldn't"(p.1145). What Dick means by "realism," then, can also be read as something like duplicity, or artificiality. His public persona, his career, the very words he speaks are all part of a projection of himself, a reality which obscures, but only barely, other aspects of his existence. To be realistic, according to Dick, is to maintain an illusion.

This kind of ambivalence is something of a defining motif in Dick's story. Dick has always had a capacity for dissimulation, which assists his career in advertising, and at this point his successful public life is asserting itself

against his less public life. Dick's sexuality, for example, is deeply ambivalent. On the one hand, he has always been a playboy and is now an eligible bachelor, and the last image we have of him is of his accepting a social invitation from the daughter of his most important client. On the other hand, however, there is a persistent suggestion of homosexuality in Dick's story, in Hiram Halsey Cooper's patronage of him, for example, or in his relationship with Ned at Harvard. The indistinct sexual adventures of the previous night - Dick takes two men named "Gloria Swanson" and "Florence" home with him and is subsequently robbed by them - are another of these suggestions, but Dick, despite his anxiety about blackmail and his life being ruined, manages to put his public face back on.

The impact of this episode derives from the way in which it manages simultaneously to represent the different interpretive possibilities of the text. The narrative places the reader in an omniscient position, recording the speech of the characters and providing a detailed representation of their surroundings. At the same time, however, the narrative also registers Dick's unease, his sense of his own artificiality. Even as he participates in the action, his internal conflict acts as a critique of his own participation. Dick is at this stage a familiar character in the text, and this episode can thus be placed in the context of what we know of Dick's personal history. But it also represents the final sacrifice of Dick to the historical process of which *U.S.A.* is so condemnatory, as he slides into Moorehouse's place and we leave him accepting a social invitation from the daughter of his client, the patent medicine magnate.

These different suggestions in the narrative can't be considered independently of one another, nor can they easily be reconciled. But it is within this kind of realistic representation that the tension between them is most pointedly evident. Another of *U.S.A.*'s final scenarios reinforces this impression. As I have said, the representation of the Sacco-Vanzetti affair is particularly important in *U.S.A.* and it is Mary French's story which juxtaposes this historical event with fictional action.

At the end of *The Big Money*, Mary French has taken a central position in the text. It is through her narrative that the political fragmentation of the U.S.A. is most pointedly represented. Her presence at Eveline Hutchins' party acts to criticize some of the values and interests which have come to

dominate the social and political environment. Margo Dowling is at the party, moving straight from the artifical sound-stage where we left her (p.1074) to the equally artificial environment at the cocktail party. Mary's friend Ada adds that they are "on their way to the Riviera" (p.1176). Their rarified presence at the party, however, interests Mary little: "'I'm sick of seeing movie actors on the screen,' said Mary, 'I don't want to see them in real life'"(p.1176)

During this period, however, Mary is embroiled in more personal conflicts. Don Stevens, with whom she is involved, has left for Russia, a trip which indicates his growing status in the Communist Party. Don's influence in the party has brought him into conflict with Ben Compton. Compton says that Stevens will " ... make the centralcommittee when they've cleaned out all the brains'"(p.1166), while Stevens has also foreshadowed Compton's expulsion from the party - which we must take alongside the sympathetic representation of Compton - in the name of "party discipline" (p.1163). At the same time, however, Ben and Don are Mary's former and current lovers, adding a personal dimension to the political conflict which is represented by their animosity. When Ben, having been expelled from the party, meets Mary inside the New York Public Library, the detailed narrative realism powerfully evokes the complexity of the reality, towards which the text is intended. When Ben speaks of his expulsion, the reasons for which are a thinly disguised accusation of Trotskyism, he affirms his commitment to social revolution. Mary's response is, at once, touching, and yet seems to undermine his revolutionary rhetoric:

> 'Oh, Ben, I'm so sorry,' was all Mary could find to say.
> 'You know I don't know anything except what I read in the *Daily*. It all seems too terrible to me.'
> 'Let's go out, that guard's watching us.'
> Outside Ben began to shiver from the cold. His wrists stuck out red from his frayed green overcoat with sleeves much to short for his long arms.
> 'Oh, where can we go ?' Mary kept saying. (p.1166)

This episode is fairly conventional narrative realism, but extremely fraught with conflicting concerns. Mary is caught between Don and Ben. Her commitment to Don makes her complicit in Ben's expulsion, but it is more a matter of ignorance than malice. Indeed, Mary, whose

revolutionary integrity is unimpeachable, confesses a kind of ignorance, she "doesn't know anything," other than the official voice of the party. But her sympathy for Ben also takes its place in the narrative, her shock at his frailty, his literally being out in the cold which complements his political isolation. The possibility of Ben's revolutionary efficacy is undermined by Mary's sense of his extreme frailty.

Personal tension and political and historical conflict then are juxtaposed, and this juxtaposition is made possible by the aggregation of individual and social perspectives in the narrative. Ben and Don are counterposed in Mary's personal life, which makes possible the representation of their political differences, which in turn represent the fragmentation of the American left, and, through the Newsreel allusions to Stalin and Trotsky, hint at a concern which extends to the politics of Soviet and world communism. Don is, after all, in Russia in 1927.

The orientation of this scene also undergoes several important shifts. While Mary is initially sympathetic, when Ben begins to turn the conversation to personal matters, she reverts to a kind of political rigidity which changes the dynamic and the representation of the scene. Ben begins to discuss their former relationship, making explicit the personal dimension of the environment, but Mary resists this development:

> 'I've always liked music ... I ought to have kept you, Mary.'
> 'A lot of water's run under the bridge since then,' said Mary coldly.
> 'Are you happy with Stevens ? I haven't any right to ask.'
> 'But, Ben, what's the use of raking all this old stuff up?' (p.1167).

Their speech has clearly changed. Whereas Mary had previously spoken hesitantly, repeating herself and resorting to platitudes like "it all seems too terrible", and Ben had delivered a series of statements about his revolutionary commitment, Mary now speaks directly, while Ben's tone is wistful rather than forceful. Ben then begins to recombine the personal and the political, hoping to be reconnected to the political machine through his personal relationship with Mary, and Mary responds with the

kind of political voice with which Don would speak: "'I don't think they want any disrupting influences in the I.L.D.,' said Mary" (p.1167).

When Mary lets slip that Stevens is "away", Ben's keen political mind seizes upon her admission:

> Ben looked at her with a sharp sudden look.
> 'He hasn't by any chance sailed for Moscow with certain other comrades ?'(p.1167)

When Mary leaves, the open conflict between them is once again vitiated. Ben's solitude recurs to Mary and she returns to soften the accusation which she last hurled at him. The personal, which had given way to the political, thus regains a certain primacy, and it is through Mary's eyes that we see Ben "staring at her, senselessly scraping the spoon round and round in the empty coffeemug" (p.1167) Ben's dejection, and above all his silence, make his personal isolation complete, just as his political dislocation has silenced the voice of social revolution which he represents.

What is interesting about this episode is the interrelation between its narrative realism and the critical concerns of the text. The narrative shifts accomodate the reader *within* Ben and Mary's relationship, making all the different dimensions of this relationship interpretively available. The negotiations between their public and private concerns provides a great deal of representational depth to this scene. The personal distance between them is represented by Mary's transition from feeling sympathetic towards Ben to feeling threatened by him. Correspondingly, Ben begins by being feverishly excited, then lapses into nostalgia. This distance represents the persistent concern in *U.S.A.* with failed relationships, but at the same time, the factional struggles of the American left, indeed of all political movements, are also figured in the space between Ben and Mary.

This multivocity is maintained when, shortly after this episode, Ben's enquiry about Mary's relationship with Stevens proves prophetic. Don returns from Moscow, an event which has profound political implications, but Mary's concern is almost entirely personal:

> Her whole body ached to feel his arms around her, for the rasp of his deep voice in her ears. All the time a

> vague worry flitted in the back of her head, because she hadn't had a letter from him while he'd been away.(p.1172)

Don, however, has married in Moscow, consummating his political life with his personal. Interestingly, Sylvia Goldstein speaks of Comrade Lichfield, Don's wife, in very personal terms:"' ... she's an English comrade ... she spoke at the big meeting at the Bronx Casino last night ... she's got a great shock of red hair ... stunning, but some of the girls think it's dyed'"(p.1173). Don's political reification corresponds to his personal betrayal of Mary, and his wife is both politically and personally threatening.

The political undertone of these episodes is unmistakable, and involves all the complicated problems of the public mind and the position of the individual, and places them into the discourse of narrative realism. This allows these ideas to be experienced on several levels. Locating the reader within the discussion between Mary and Ben, for example, represents Mary's different personal and political interests, suggesting that the general political movements with which the text is concerned cannot be considered in isolation from the concrete lives of individuals. When Stevens returns, Mary's personal emotional life is the representational focus, and it is her disappointment which allows the reader to experience the personal cost of her public commitment to the movement. The narrative realism which allows the reader to enter this environment is thus the vehicle of the text's critique of politics and of history.

U.S.A. is a complicated text. As I have tried to show in this thesis, literary realism is a complex aesthetic phenomenon and, in *U.S.A.*, this complexity is very much in evidence. The cities and nations, the real social background of the trilogy, are represented not as simple objective realities but as arenas in which social and historical activities take place. The fraught relationship between individuals and their environment is both the relationship which makes realism possible, and the most pointed problem which emerges from these social activities. Through the idea of realism which I have tried to develop in this thesis, the different understandings of the function of history in *U.S.A.*, and their different interpretive consequences, can be brought into a complicated dialogue with each other. The narrative of *U.S.A.* and its unusual form synthesize

the representational and critical dimensions of the text in the same way as this thesis has tried to effect a synthesis of critical theory and the realistic novel.

epilogue: the interpretation of realism

In the theoretical sections of this thesis I have tried to offer a particular way of understanding the idea of the realistic novel. Briefly to recapitulate, I have tried to develop a theory of interpretation which reconciles the need for determinate interpretation with the ineluctable problems associated with interpretation. Generally, my theoretical approach has been to try to think both these ideas at once.

In the last two chapters I have tested this theory against the interpretation of two realistic novels. As I have tried to demonstrate, realism always involves an interpretive process, and if interpretation is understood as at once necessary and problematic, then the interpretation of a realistic novel inherits this theoretical tension. It is towards preserving this hermeneutic tension that this study has been intended. Critical theory, I have argued, is at its most creative when it clearly anticipates its own interpretive possibilities while recognizing its own limitations. Criticism which characterizes realism and theory as fundamentally opposed seems to fail to appreciate this tension: within such critical schemes, both phenomena are static, reduced to simple argumentative propositions. By suggesting how critical theory and the realistic novel might be synthesized, I have tried to restore the dynamic qualities of both theory and realism, and to reaffirm the fundamental tension between representation and interpretation. My approach, however, is necessarily an interpretation of the material. It, like the literary theories and texts which it has encompassed, is necessarily subject to challenge and to reconsideration.

bibliography

The large amount of material consulted in the course of my research has made necessary several divisions in the following bibliography. Section A includes works of fiction; Section B includes the work of theorists who are discussed *in detail* in Parts I and II; Section C lists important secondary material, particularly that which relates directly to works listed in Sections A and B; Section D includes works consulted for general historical, philosophical, and theoretical background material, and all other works of literary theory and criticism which are not directly discussed in the thesis.

Significant discrepancies between the date of original composition or publication and of the particular edition or translation of works consulted are, for the most part, addressed in footnotes by the inclusion of the date of original publication. Where this has not been possible in the body of the thesis and acknowledgement is necessary, it will be made here by a second date, in parentheses, after the date of publication of the edition actually consulted.

Some critical works have been consulted in their original language and, in some cases, in my translation from the original I have consulted well-known published translations. In these cases, both the original and the translation are included here.

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